

A New Era

by ardith

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Summary: 5 years after the beginning of their story, the Kenshin-gumi's lives are changing yet again.

1. beginnings

A New Era: Part 1 -- Beginnings

> ** Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era **

>
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> Of course, all characters I create belong to me.
 Notes:

> Mochi: A Japanese dessert. It's kind of doughy. I really like mochi ice cream! ^_^
 Japanese:

> Ohayougozaimasu: Good morning

> shihondai: assistant instructor in martial arts. Kaoru is a kendo shihondai in the beginning of RK.

> Karachi: boyfriend

> Ai: Shin-chan has a baby lisp. He can't say 'Hai.'. It's baby Japanese for 'yes'.

> Yosha: All right!

> Oi!: Hey!

> Kon-chiwa: Good day.

> Konbanwa: Good evening.

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> **A New Era: Part 1 -- Beginnings**

>

>> Kaoru's face was glowing, Kenshin noted with a smile. He loved her so much that sometimes it made his heart hurt to look at her. Today, she and Yahiko were training the beginning level group of the Kamiya

Kasshin-Ryu. She certainly had a lot of energy today. A whole lot. But just this morning, it had been a totally different story.

>>

>> "_Ohayougozaimasu_, Kaoru-sensei! _Ohayougozaimasu_, Yahiko-sensei!" the students chimed out in greeting. The sounds of practice soon filled the dojo's training hall.

>>

>> Five years after he had first began his stay here, the Kamiya Dojo had become a busy place. The promised peace that the Meiji Era tried so hard to bring about was finally being achieved. It was now the prerogative of the government to absorb as much Western technology as they could to make the nation stronger. The government promised to use the strength learned from the West to protect their country from the West. At least, Kenshin thought, there were changes being made to the society as a whole. Slowly but surely, there was more acceptance of the modern era, even though there was still room left for improvement.

>>

>> "That's it, Yahiko!" Kaoru smiled as Yahiko twisted in the air and knocked the bokken out of her hands. "I think that this week you can start teaching class," she said, panting.

>>

>> Yahiko blushed, rubbing the back of his head as he grinned. He turned to the students, nodding and began to demonstrating a new technique. At 15, he had grown taller than both Kenshin and Kaoru and he was finally growing comfortable with his new proportions. He both knew and accepted that he had a gift for the art of swordfighting. Kaoru was giving him more and more responsibility now. They were finally accepting that he was an adult and he wasn't about to let either of them down. He turned to his students and smiled with just a hint of malice. Yahiko was going to work with them so that they would be the best that they could be. And boy was it going to be hard. At least on them....

>>

>> Kaoru watched as Yahiko put them through the paces he himself had gone through a few years earlier. Her eyes teared up a bit as she acknowledged that he was growing up. _Dang it! My emotions are so out of whack!_ She rubbed at her eyes. What in the world was wrong with her?

>>

>> Lately, for some reason, she had been feeling so nauseous in the early hours of the day. But she had not actually gotten sick until this morning. Kenshin thought she was coming down with something and insisted she visit Megumi after he woke up before dawn to see her run off, trying not to get sick in front of him.

>>

>> "Kaoru, you have to go see her!" Kenshin demanded as he helped her compose herself afterwards. His violet eyes were serious as he took in his wife's pale face. He frowned when she shook her head.

>>

>> "But Kenshin, I feel fine! It was probably something I ate or something. I _don't_ want to bother her about this. Especially now!" Megumi had enough to juggle. Kaoru did not want to add another problem to the list.

>>

>> "Kaoru."

>>

>> Kaoru sighed.

>>

>> Whenever Kenshin said her name that way, she knew that she was

going to lose. He was so stubborn when it came to certain things. She peered up at him to gauge just how stubborn he was going to be. She sighed again and gritted her teeth. Despite his resolve, she gave token protest for a few more minutes before giving in to the inevitable.

>>

>> "Fine," she muttered, giving in. Then Kenshin smiled his goofy smile and walked out of their room to make breakfast. She shook her head at his mood. Got your way this time. My turn next! Sometimes she could not believe that they were finally married. Her life had changed so much since Kenshin had come into it. She could never imagine life without him, without Yahiko or Megumi or Sanosuke.

>>

>> She sighed as she got dressed for the day. She was feeling so tired lately, too. It was really strange. Sometimes she felt so exhausted around midafternoon that she just wanted to nap. But the rest of the day, she was just fine.

>>

>> "Geesh.... What the heck is wrong with me?"

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "Kaoru! How are you?" Megumi greeted her with her usual half-smile.

>>

>> "Hmmm, fine. Um, well..." she hesitated. Kaoru didn't know what to tell her. It's all Kenshin's fault! He made me come here! Megumi didn't need to be bothered so close to her time! "How are you? How's the baby?"

>>

>> Megumi's stomach was huge. Kaoru put her hand over the baby and was rewarded with a hard kick by a tiny foot within. Kaoru thought that Megumi looked wonderful. She was less than a month off from her due date and it totally showed. Pregnancy agreed with her. She ran around, doing her usual activities without batting an eyelash.

>>

>> "He always wants taro mochi." Megumi's smile widened. "Poor Sanosuke. I keep waking up in the middle of the night and making him get some for us."

>>

>> Megumi and Sanosuke's love-hate relationship had turned out to be more love than hate. After a very turbulent courtship, they got married and Megumi promptly got pregnant. (It could have been the other way around, but no one ever said that out loud. Sano was not someone to piss off and neither was Megumi....) Their 3-year-old son Shinnosuke was going to be a big brother. And soon.

>>

>> "He?"

>>

>> "At least that's what Sano declares the baby is going to be."

>>

>> "How does he know?"

>>

>> "Sanosuke says he has a feeling about it."

>>

>> "Heh. The only feeling that Sanosuke is right about is when food is gonna be on the table! He's uncanny when it comes to that."

>>

>> "Uh-uh. He said the same thing when we were going to have Shinnosuke. He was absolutely positive. 'It's gonna be a boy.' That's

what he said to me as soon as we found out we were going to have Shinnosuke. He said the same thing this time."

>>

>> "Really? Maybe he is more useful than he seems...."

>>

>> "He is. Most definitely," Megumi returned with great feeling, grinning wickedly.

>>

>> "Megumi!"

>>

>> "I'm sure Ken-san is just as useful."

>>

>> "Me-gu-mi!" Megumi merely smiled back, unrepentant.

>>

>> "Kaoru- what's wrong?" She looks worried about something, Megumi thought to herself. It had been 5 years since they had all met. So many things had changed, but some things never did. Megumi had always teased Kaoru like a younger sister. Kaoru and Megumi could say whatever they wanted to each other. Always.

>>

>> It had been Megumi who had urged Kaoru to seduce her redhead love. The time had definitely come for it. Kenshin, Megumi declared, would never make a move on her unless she forced his hand (and other things) first. So, she told Kaoru what to do. As a result, Kenshin and Kaoru were finally together. Of course, certain things took a lot of explaining on Megumi's part. Kaoru, for all her time alone in the world, was truly sheltered when it came to lot of things.

>>

>> "I don't know. Kenshin wanted me to come over. He was worried and wanted you to check me out. I, um, well....," she hesitated. "I've been getting sick in the mornings... I don't know what's going on. I feel fine afterwards. Nothing really bad until this morning. So Kenshin made me come here. He used his

'I'm-not-backing-down-so-you'd-better-do-it' voice. So I gave in."

>>

>> "You're getting sick in the mornings?" Megumi asked, leaning forward to look closely at Kaoru's face, smiling slightly. "Hmmm..."

>>

>> "'Hmmm....?' What does that mean?" Kaoru looked worriedly at Megumi. Megumi smiled even wider.

>>

>> "The 'hmmm' was just me thinking. Is anything else going on that you want to tell me about? Do you get really tired, especially in the afternoons?"

>>

>> "Yeah. How did you know?"

>>

>> "Ah, Kaoru-chan. You remember when we had that discussion about men and women?"

>>

>> "Yes."

>>

>> "You remember how I said that women got pregnant from men and how everything happened and why."

>>

>> Kaoru turned red. "Of course I remember what you told me! What does that have to do with anything?"

>>

>> "Kaoru-chan. It looks like I have a bit more to explain. Have you had your monthly visitor?"
>>
>> "M-My what?"
>>
>> "You know...."
>>
>> "Oh! Ah, um, let's see.... Now that I think of it, no. I'm a few weeks late...."
>>
>> "Kaoru-chan. All the symptoms you have point to one thing."
>>
>> "Symptoms? One thing? You know what's wrong with me?"
>>
>> "From all indications, you, Himura Kaoru, are most likely gonna be one busy shihondai in around 7 or 8 months, in more ways than one," Megumi explained. "It looks like Ken-san made you pregnant." At that, Himura Kaoru promptly fainted.
>>
>> *****
>>
>> Megumi sent Sanosuke and their son over to the Kamiya Dojo to get Kenshin after Kaoru was put onto a futon to sleep off her shock. She needed the rest. Kaoru's body was going through a lot of changes and that took a lot of energy.
>>
>> "Don't tell him she fainted. Knowing Kenshin, he might go crazy with worry."
>>
>> "Yeah. I got it. Come on, Shin-chan."
>>
>> Shinnosuke looked like a tiny replica of his father, much to his mother's chagrin. Megumi declared it was completely unfair that Shinnosuke should look so much like Sano. She did all the work. To that, Sanosuke muttered something about her liking all the activities and stuff beforehand and that she should be happy with such a drop-dead gorgeous son. Then he grinned and asked if she wanted to try for a daughter.
>>
>> "No way! I have to recover first."
>>
>> "Heh. You say that every night."
>>
>> "Sano!" Sanosuke was the only man who could make her blush. Megumi had seen a lot of things as a doctor. What went on between men and women did not shock her at all after all this time. It was just something about Sano that made her feel like a teenager with her first kareshi.
>>
>> "Jou-chan's okay, right?"
>>
>> "Yes. She's just surprised about something...."
>>
>> "Fainted from surprise, huh?" Sanosuke drawled. "So, Kenshin finally knocked her up."
>>
>> "Sanosuke!"
>>
>> "Megumi-chan!" Sano returned, winking at his wife.
>>

>> "How did you know?" Megumi demanded.
>>
>> "Kenshin and Kaoru have been married for how long? I'd say that it was about time. Actually, I was expecting it much sooner."
>>
>> "Don't ruin the surprise. Kaoru gets to tell him."
>>
>> "Okay! I got it. Shin-chan, don't say anything about what 'kachan and 'touchan were talking about to Ken-niichan. 'kay?"
>>
>> "_Ai!_" Shinnosuke grinded his father's grin back at him.
>>
>> "_Yosha_! Here we go!"
>>
>> *****
>>
>> Kenshin and Yahiko sat on the porch of the dojo, the shade of the overhang offering them some relief from the heat of the summer sun. Kaoru left to visit Megumi hours ago. They probably were talking. Or she was playing with Shinnosuke. Kenshin was getting worked up over nothing. Something probably just disagreed with her stomach. What did they have the night before? Maybe it was the mushrooms in the miso soup, or bad tofu. But Kenshin and Yahiko were both fine, so it couldn't be that....
>>
>> "_Oi!_ Kenshin! Yahiko!" Sanosuke's familiar growl announced his arrival at the dojo's front gate.
>>
>> "Heh! Sanosuke! How's Megumi holding up? Last time I saw her, she looked ready to burst!" Yahiko yelled out in greeting. He got up from the stoop to meet them. He grinded when he saw that Shinnosuke had come with his father.
>>
>> "Megumi? She's fine. I'm the one who has to try to find taro mochi in the middle of the night," he stated, rubbing at his head ruefully. "Nothing ever slows that woman down, huh Shin-chan?"
>>
>> "Ai! _Kon-chiwa_, Yahiko-niicha! Ken-niicha!"
>>
>> "_Konbanwa_, Shin-kun." Yahiko began to dance around the toddler, making faces and funny noises to entertain him while Kenshin and Sanosuke talked.
>>
>> "Heh, Shin-chan really loves when Yahiko does that.... Kenshin. You better get over to our place and pick up your woman."
>>
>> "Eh? What's-"
>>
>> "Megumi's orders." Sanosuke broke in before Kenshin could finish. "You don't want to cross that woman when she's this pregnant." He held out his arms to demonstrate just how big Megumi was at the moment. "She says it's important. Get Yahiko, too. We can use him to distract Shin-chan while you all talk. That way, Megumi and I get a break too! Shinnosuke has more energy than his mother and I do combined sometimes. And don't worry about Jou-chan. She's fine. Megumi just wants you two to come over, since Kaoru is already there. You can eat at our place. Megumi says that she misses seeing you two now that she's so close to her time. You know she can't walk down here to visit. Let's go!"
>>

```
>> "Oro~!" Kenshin said as Sano began to drag him out of the dojo.  
>>  
>> "Come on, Yahiko, Shinnosuke. Megumi-sama is waiting."  
>>  
>> "Kaoru is okay?"  
>>  
>> "Yeah. But you all are definitely not gonna be the same after  
this." Sanosuke grinned. This was gonna be more fun than watching  
Kenshin and Kaoru finally get together. Yup. There were big changes  
coming up for everyone at the dojo.
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> <a href=".." target="_top">ardith's fanfiction
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2. confessions and announcements

A New Era: Part 2 -- Confessions and Announcements

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> **Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era**  
>  
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>  
> All characters I create belong to me.  
> Note:<br> ****Spoiler warning**: Kyoto Saga/Departure. But only a  
little bit!**  
>  
> Japanese:  
> <em>tadaima</em>: I'm/we're home!  
><em>okaeri(nasai)</em>: welcome home  
>  
> Revised on 12/09/98  
> Updated with new revisions: 124/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth  
>  
> Enjoy!  
>Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com) <br>http://www.hanabatake.com  
>  
> **A New Era: Part 2 - Confessions and Announcements**  
>  
>> "Kenshin, its too early to wake up...." Kaoru moaned as she rolled  
over, trying to avoid the hand that was shaking her shoulder.  
>>  
>> "Kaoru, I'm not Kenshin. Wake up. We have to talk."  
>>  
>> "Megumi? Oh. What happened?" Kaoru blinked in confusion.  
>>  
>> "You passed out," Megumi replied dryly. "One of the neat things  
that happens from time to time when you're pregnant."  
>>  
>> "Megumi! _ I'm pregnant!_" Kaoru's eyes began to fill with tears.  
She couldn't believe that she was really going to have Kenshin's  
baby. A baby. She lowered her hand to her stomach, as if trying to  
feel the life-force within.  
>>  
>> "That's what you get when you do what you've been doing with
```

Ken-san." Megumi hunkered down to sit more comfortably next to her.
"Didn't you think that it would happen?"
>>
>> "I-I thought about it, b-but... I can't believe it's really
happening."
>>
>> "Heh, now you get to experience all of this first hand. For the
next 7 or 8 months, your body will be going through so many changes,
it will make your head spin."
>>
>> "Changes? Oh! Kenshin!"
>>
>> "Huh?"
>>
>> "Megumi. How am I gonna tell him?" Kaoru sat up on her knees and
began to gesticulate frantically. "Will he be happy about it? Of
course he will! He loves children! He's going to be a wonderful
father. Megumi! Everything is going to change. Megumi...." Kaoru's
eyes went big. "I'm going to be a mommy." The enormity of it all made
her tremble.
>>
>> "Calm down, Kaoru. I know it's a lot to take in." Megumi put her
arm around her to reassure her. "I told Sanosuke to fetch Kenshin.
They're coming over right now."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "How did you tell Sanosuke?" Kaoru asked, after taking a deep
breath of the cooling summer air. She had put away the futon in an
effort to calm herself. Megumi and Kaoru sat on the porch of the
house, talking in the late afternoon breeze.
>>
>> "The first time?" Megumi smiled. Her face was full of feminine
mystery.
>>
>> "Yeah. How did you tell him? I never thought of it until today.
When you were pregnant with Shin-chan, Sanosuke was the one who
announced it to everyone. When did you tell him?"
>>
>> "I pushed him into the river. After **he** told me."
>>
>> "Huh?"
>>
>> "I had just realized that we were going to have a baby, and I was
so excited about it. We were talking as he walked me to the clinic.
It was a beautiful day and I thought that it would be a perfect time
to tell him. The sun was shining off the water and all.... I told him
I wanted to go there to look at the water." Megumi smiled at the
memory.
>>
>> "Sano grumbled a bit, like he always does. We walked down there
and looked at the water. I wanted the moment to be perfect. We didn't
say anything for a couple of minutes, just stared out at the water.
Then suddenly, Sanosuke turned around and started yelling at me.
'Well? Are you going to tell me I finally knocked you up?!?' I was so
surprised at him. Then I got mad."
>>
>> Kaoru began to laugh. "Sanosuke knew? How?"
>>
>> "Apparently, that had been his goal from the beginning. He had

been counting days to make sure. I was so angry at him, I pushed him into the water and started to walk away."

>>

>> "You were mad at him? For making you pregnant?"

>>

>> "No. For ruining the moment! Here I was, bent on building atmosphere, and he blew it. Anyway, he got out of the water and ran up to me and grabbed me and started spinning me around and around." Megumi's eyes softened at the memory. "He was wet and cold. But he didn't care. Don't tell him that I told you, but he had tears in his eyes. He just kept spinning me around in circles, telling me how happy he was and how much he loved me. It was one of the most beautiful moments that we've shared."

>>

>> "How wonderful. Later, when you two came over and told the rest of us, Sanosuke was so proud when he made the announcement."

>>

>> "Yes. Sano loves children. He was very excited that he finally was going to have some of his own." Megumi patted her belly. "And you better be better behaved than your oniichan! I swear, Shin-chan gets into so many fixes that my hair is going to turn gray before he's five. Sano just looks at him and he says that he gets it from my side of the family."

>>

>> "_Tadaima_!" Sano called out to them as they stepped through the gates to the courtyard of their home. Shinosuke was riding on his father's shoulders, holding on to Sano's hair spikes, which were sagging just a bit. Kenshin and Yahiko followed behind them, a wee bit damp looking as well.

>>

>> "_Okaerinasai_. Finally. What took you so long?" she asked, looking up at them. "What happened?" She looked at the men in her life, her arms akimbo. They looked very wet for the short walk from the dojo to their house.

>>

>> "Nothing, really." Sano looked away from his wife and started whistling. Shin-chan tried to copy his father, but just ended up blowing spittle onto his father's hair.

>>

>> "N-Nothing..." both Kenshin and Yahiko stammered, looking away.

>>

>> Megumi looked at all their faces. They looked guilty. Or they were at hiding something. She made her decision and looked to her darling son.

>>

>> "Shin-chan?"

>>

>> "Ai?"

>>

>> "Tell 'kachan what happened."

>>

>> "What 'appened?" Her son looked down from his place on his father's shoulders and smiled at her. It was one of pure innocence. But Megumi knew her little angel oh too well.

>>

>> "Yes. Why are your father, Kenshin and Yahiko so wet?"

>>

>> "It was....wraining?"

>>

>> "Sagara Shinosuke." Megumi used his full name. One of the weapons in her "mommy arsenal". "That's not true. What did I say about lying?"
>>
>> "It's bad. Sworry. 'Kachan pwomise not to get mwad?"
>>
>> "I promise."
>>
>> Kenshin and Yahiko began to slink away, leaving Sano and Shinosuke to Megumi. At least they tried. They didn't get very far.
>>
>> "You two, don't move either," she said in the voice. It was something, she told Kaoru later, that all mothers acquire after giving birth. Very handy in making people freeze and confess their crimes in no time at all.
>>
>> "We goin' home and Shin wanted to see the water in the river. Shin went 'n ran down...."
>>
>> "And?"
>>
>> "Shin twiped and fwell," Shinosuke finished, seeing his mother would not be satisfied till she got more of the story.
>>
>> "All of you went after him?"
>>
>> "Yeah. Um... He got away from us, so we ran like heck to catch up. We got there just in time before he fell in. We pushed him back, but we ended up falling into the water 'cuz we...we all bumped into each other," Yahiko confessed. "So much for our combined reflexes."
>>
>> Megumi paled a little at the thought of her son falling into the river's waters. Even though in the summer the river ran low, Shinosuke couldn't swim yet.
>>
>> "Is that why you didn't want to tell me?"
>>
>> "Hey, woman, it's kinda embarrassing. Shinosuke is the only one who didn't get wet. Anyway, we saved him from a dunking. And he is going to learn how to swim starting tomorrow." Sano put his son on the ground and squeezed more water from his clothes. He took a seat on the wooden porch before the entrance to the house.
>>
>> "Yah!!"
>>
>> Megumi sighed as Shin-chan began to dance around in joy. Only their Shinosuke could get away with a stunt like that and get rewarded in his eyes at the same time. He was definitely going to turn her hair gray.
>>
>> She turned to say something to Kaoru about it, but she and Kenshin were busy looking into each other's eyes. No one could get Kaoru's attention away from Kenshin when they were looking at each other like that.
>>
>> "Are you okay?" he asked, moving closer to her.
>>
>> "Um, yes. Megumi says I'm perfectly healthy."
>>
>> "Really?" He still looked worried.

>>
>> "In fact, Megumi says that I should be getting even healthier!"

>>
>> Megumi coughed at that. _"Getting even healthier?" I guess that's true...._

>>
>> "Well, I'm going to go get dinner ready."

>>
>> "Oh. I'll do it." Kaoru offered. Megumi should be resting, not running around making food. Yahiko groaned. Kaoru retaliated by hitting him on the head. She had been improving a lot in that area. Really. No one was getting sick anymore, anyway....

>>
>> "I'll help," said Kenshin.

>>
>> "No way." Sanosuke got up and stretched. "Tonight, I'll be making dinner."

>>
>> Kenshin, Kaoru, and Yahiko looked at each other in confusion. Sanosuke could cook? He never offered to do so before. Marriage apparently did amazing things him. They looked over to Megumi, who looked at Sano, who had bent down to look at his very excited son.

>>
>> "Yah!!! Fish!!! Fish!!!" Shin-chan began to jump up and down with anticipation. "Can I help, 'touchan?'"

>>
>> "Yeah, come on." Sano patted Megumi's stomach in greeting and walked into the house.

>>
>> Megumi sighed again. "That's the only thing he can cook. Fish grilled over an open fire. I've been eating it for the last week and a half," Megumi said resignedly. "Ah well.... It'll be good for a summer night."

>>
>> *****

>>
>> Kenshin was still worried about Kaoru. She seemed distracted throughout dinner. Even though she had assured him she was fine, she didn't seem herself.

>>
>> "Kenshin," Kaoru said in a soft voice as they walked the dirt road to the dojo.

>>
>> "What is it?"

>>
>> "Let's stop here. I want to talk to you." Kaoru had been thinking about where to make her big announcement to him. It finally hit her as they were walking towards the dojo. It was perfect.

>>
>> "I'm going to go ahead to the dojo, okay?" Megumi had pulled him aside and told him to give them some private time, but Yahiko was not a fool. He already knew when it was time retreat and let the couple have a bit of privacy. He had lived with them long enough. Something big was going to happen. Though he was curious, he was not about to ruin the moment, whatever it was. They would tell him about it later.

>>
>> The stars were out, brightly twinkling in the night sky overhead.

They walked down to the edge of the river bank. She looked across the water at the fireflies flickering, reminding her of the past, encouraging her about the future. It was a night like this, on the road near here, that he had left her in the dark to return to wandering. He left her so he could stop a mad man. That night, Kaoru had cried herself to sleep. She loved Kenshin so much.

>>

>> Kenshin stared out at the dark beauty of the water and the lights. He, too, was reminded of that dark night when he had to say good-bye the one he loved the most. It still pained him that he had hurt her so much when he walked off into the darkness.

>>

>> "It's beautiful, isn't it?" His voice broke the silence, the calm of the night.

>>

>> "Yes. Kenshin, I love you so much."

>>

>> Kenshin opened his arms and gathered her close, breathing in her smell, needing to feel her close to him. "I love you, too. Kaoru, what's wrong? You looked so preoccupied all through dinner. Are you okay?"

>>

>> He looked down at her face. _Tears?_

>>

>> "Kaoru? What is it?"

>>

>> "Kenshin....," Kaoru's voice trembled with emotion as she took his hand and placed it on her stomach. "Kenshin, we're going to have a baby." She savored the words. They were so easy to say once she did. The tears in her eyes spilled down her face. Tears of joy. She had to say the words again. "We're having a baby."

>>

>> Kenshin's eyes grew big. He gathered her closer and held her tightly to him. He didn't say anything for a long time.

>>

>> "Kenshin?"

>>

>> "I-I love you. Kaoru, I love you so much."

>>

>> "Kenshin." She turned around to face him.

>>

>> "Life would not be worth living without you. I'm so happy. I can't tell you how happy I am." His hands trembled as he touched her face gently, his finger tips tracing down her cheek to her lips. Then he kissed her, his lips conveying to her without words how he felt.

>>

>> They stood for a long time, just holding each other.

Go to

>Part 3<a>

3. anticipation and arrivals

A New Era: Part 3 -- Anticipation and Arrivals

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>

> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era

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> All characters I create belong to me.
> Note:
 **Spoiler warning: Kyoto Saga/Departure. But only a
little bit!**
>
> Japanese:
> Tadaima: I'm/we're home!
>Okaeri(nasai): welcome home
>
> Revised on 12/09/98
>Updated with new revisions: 0216/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth
>
> Enjoy!
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>
> **A New Era: Part 3 -- Anticipation and Arrivals **
>
>> The dojo was quiet when Yahiko got up for the day. The peaceful
time before the dawn was one of his favorites. No one was up yet, so
he began to do the basic morning chores. Five years before, waking up
to appreciate the dawn was something that was near the bottom of his
lists of things to do on a given day. He had been a virtual slave to
that yakuza gang. He thanked whatever gods watched him that he was
lucky enough to have met up with Kaoru and Kenshin. Maybe one day, he
would be able to bring himself to talk about those years.
>>
>> He never told them because he did not want Kenshin or Kaoru to
worry, but sometimes, late at night in those early days, he would
wake up from nightmares. Nightmares that no one was there to help
him. That he had to stay in that hellhole. That no one cared.
>>
>> That was the thing about mornings. They made him philosophical
about his past. Training in the Kamiya Kasshin-Ryu also forced him to
reach down deep to his soul for answers, to find himself. It was a
school that forced you to grow as a person, to think before you act
(although Kaoru had needed some work on that part of it). Though he
certainly would not admit it to Kaoru, it was that inner strength
that he gained that helped him get past those nightmares.
>>
>> "Yahiko. _ Ohayo_"
>>
>> "Ah. Kenshin. _Ohayo_. "
>>
>> "Kaoru up yet?" Kenshin fell in beside him, helping to fetch water
for the morning meal. Kenshin still woke up early to make breakfast,
since it was the meal Kaoru was worst at making.
>>
>> "No. She's still asleep."
>>
>> "She's feeling okay, then. Last night she was still acting a
little weird."
>>
>> "Megumi said that she was fine. _Ano_, Yahiko-kun...."
>>

>> "Yeah?" he replied hesitantly. Yahiko-_kun_?
>>
>> "We have to talk...."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "She's **WHAT**?!?" Yahiko yelled. The birds took exception to his loud outburst, flying from the trees, squawking indignantly.
>>
>> "Kaoru is pregnant. We're going to have a baby." Kenshin stared up at the sky. He knew that Yahiko had to have time to get use to the idea. He still felt dazed about it all himself.
>>
>> Yahiko shook his head, trying to clear the confusion from it. A baby? Kenshin and Kaoru were going to have a baby? It wasn't that it was so surprising. Okay. It was that it was so surprising. Even though Kenshin and Kaoru were married, there was still a sense of continuity with all their relationships. In so many ways, Kaoru still seemed like the teenager that he had met all those years ago. Now Kaoru and Kenshin were going to be having children? It boggled his mind.
>>
>> "A baby. Kenshin, you and Kaoru are going to be parents...."
>>
>> "That's why Kaoru has been feeling strange lately. They're the signs of the early stages of pregnancy. She's going through a lot right now, so...." At those words, Yahiko grinned.
>>
>> "Congratulations! It's about time!" Yahiko patted the father-to-be on the back.
>>
>> "Oro~!"
>>
>> "I mean, you two have been married for a while now, right? I figure, you two have been busy enough." He winked and nudged at Kenshin, whose face was a very interesting shade of red.
>>
>> "Oro-ro-ro~. Yahiko-kun...."
>>
>> "I can't wait!" Yahiko grinned even wider. "Having a baby around the dojo is going to be great. Hopefully this baby will be a little more behaved than Megumi and Sanosuke's kid. Whatever you all need, I'm here to help. You're going to be a great father. And Kaoru. She's already had practice being a mother with me. And she's done a good job these last five years, if I do say so myself."
>>
>> "Yahiko." Kenshin put his hands on the young man's shoulders to look into his eyes. "Thank you."
>>
>> "So....," the teenager drawled. "That's what you two were talking about last night by the water. Heh. I hope you didn't tire her out last night celebrating."
>>
>> "Oro~!" For some reason, Kenshin turned even redder. Yahiko grinned and shook his head as he walked towards the dojo for his early morning meditation. Life since he came to the Kamiya Dojo, he thought to himself, had been pretty good for the most part. And it looked like it was going to get even more interesting very soon.
>>
>> *****

>>

>> Kaoru slowly stood up, mentally checking her body for any protests. There was no nausea or anything. She grinned to herself as she got dressed in a blue walking kimono. Maybe it was the fact that Kenshin was being so kind and sweet. He had brought her a cup of hot tea before she was awake to help soothe the morning sickness away. He was being so attentive since she broke the news to him last night.

>>

>> She felt her cheeks heat when she thought of last night. They had celebrated the news by making love. Kenshin had been so gentle and careful with her. He touched her like she was made of glass. His hands were rough and callused from working with his sword, but they moved so gently on her last night. Kenshin looked at her body, trying to see the changes that the baby inside her was making. Everything was so wonderful, she felt like melting just thinking about it again.

>>

>> She sighed as she finished tying her obi, making sure the bow was centered at her back. She didn't know she could have been more happy than she was until she found out that they were going to have a baby. But she had some questions for Megumi. She hoped that it would be all right go over and talk about what other changes were going to be in store for her.

>>

>> It had been over 3 years since Megumi's first pregnancy. Since she and Sanosuke had gotten married and moved in together into the house a few blocks from the dojo, Kaoru wasn't around to witness the morning sickness or any other changes that occurred with Megumi those first few months. She had always visited her in the afternoons to help Megumi with her regular patients to lessen the work for Megumi.

>>

>> And during the early part of this pregnancy, Megumi was very healthy. Kaoru had never recalled her having any morning sickness at all. Kaoru had asked her about that. Apparently, for Megumi, this second child had not given her any trouble, morning sickness wise.

>>

>> "Maybe Sanosuke is wrong and it IS a girl, this time," Kaoru teased when they had a bit of time alone last night. "A girl might be more considerate of her mother."

>>

>> At that, Megumi tilted her head in consideration. "Hmmm. Maybe. But he says he has the strongest feeling about it. We'll see when this little one decides to come out." Megumi replied, rubbing her belly with a soft smile.

>>

>> Kaoru didn't even know how much it was going to hurt when the baby finally decided to come out!. Yesterday afternoon, before the others arrived, Megumi described how everything worked during the birthing process, but she didn't mention how it would feel. Now that she had time to think on it, the logistics of it, the facts all pointed to a rather painful experience.

>>

>> Not that Kaoru regretted being pregnant. She loved the fact that she and Kenshin were going to have a baby together. A living symbol of their love. It was just that she needed to know more about what was going to happen before she started to scare herself silly imagining horrendous pain or whatever. She needed to visit Megumi as

soon as possible, she decided.

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "Kaoru," Yahiko said as he uncurled himself from his position on the dojo floor. He grinned and ran over to her.

>>

>> "_Ohayo_, Yahiko."

>>

>> "Kenshin told me the news. _Omedetogozaimasu._"

>>

>> "Thank you." Kaoru's eyes filled with tears again. Her emotions had been very much on the surface for several weeks now. Now that she knew the reason why, she seemed to be even more prone to cry.

>>

>> Yahiko came forward to stand before his teacher. He loved this woman as a sister. As a mother. She helped him in more ways than he could ever count. He topped Kaoru by several inches now that he was hitting his growing time. He gently wrapped his arms around her and hugged her.

>>

>> "That was for being there for me all this time, Kaoru-sensei." Yahiko knelt down and rubbed her stomach gently. "Now I can help you," he whispered to the baby within her.

>>

>> "Yahiko. Thank you. That's sweet." Kaoru hugged the young man and wiped the tears from her eyes. "Now, see. You make me cry. And happy. Sometimes, you make me happy."

>>

>> "Well, I haffta keep an eye on these kids, you know."

>>

>> "You are certainly one of the best older brothers that I've ever seen around. Shinnosuke loves you to death."

>>

>> "Yeah, well. Anyway, where are you off to so early?"

>>

>> "Megumi's. I have a couple of questions for her. Can you teach the afternoon class if I don't get back in time."

>>

>> "Yeah. Don't worry about it. Later on tonight, though, I'm off to the Akabeko."

>>

>> "Heh. To visit Tsubame-chan?" Kaoru teased. It was Yahiko's turn to turn red.

>>

>> "Um. Yeah. Anyway, I might stay to help out over there," he rushed on. Yahiko's part-time job at the Akabeko was pretty much an established institution. The regulars knew him and expected him to be there.

>>

>> "Fine. Be careful coming home at night."

>>

>> "Of course," Yahiko grinned.

>>

>> "Kaoru. Yahiko," Kenshin's soft voice came from behind them. He stood in the doorway leading into the practice room.

>>

>> "Ah, Kenshin. I'm going to Megumi's to talk."

>>

>> "I'll walk you over there."

>>
>> "Thanks."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "Megumi?" Kaoru called when she got to their house. "Where are you?"
>>
>> "Kaoru-chan?" Megumi's voice came from the bedroom. She sounded winded.
>>
>> "Megumi. What are you doing-- Oh my... _ You're having the baby_?!?"
>>
>> "Yes, well, he doesn't seem to want to wait. Shin-chan and Sano went to the river this morning. I just started..." Her eyes rolled back with the pain of a contraction. She sucked in air and began to pant. "...s-started right after they left."
>>
>> "Wait here. I'll go get Gensai-sensei." Kaoru turned, poised to run to the clinic.
>>
>> "That's not going to do any good. He and the children went to visit his sister yesterday. They'll be gone for a week. I wasn't supposed to have the baby for another month."
>>
>> "Megumi? I can't leave you!"
>>
>> "You'll have to help me, Kaoru-chan."
>>
>> "What do I have to do?"
>>
>> Megumi told her to gather supplies and to how much water to boil to clean the baby afterwards. She panted out the instructions from her position on the futon on the ground. Kaoru took a calming breath and swiftly moved to follow Megumi's directions.
>>
>> "Why did you come over anyway?" She asked during a lull between contractions.
>>
>> "I was going to ask about how everything was going to feel when it happened. But I guess I'm going to witness it, huh?" She smiled down at Megumi.
>>
>> "Yes. Of course, first babies usually don't arrive this fast. I was in pain for several long, long hours before Shinnosuke was born."

>>
>> "Really?"
>>
>> "Yes. It hurt a lot. A whole lot. But it was totally worth it." She grinned, but it turned into a grimace as she felt the pain course through her.
>>
>> "Kaoru-chan. I think the baby is coming."
>>
>> "Now?!?"
>>
>> "Yes. NOW!" Kaoru held out her hands as Megumi pushed, bringing a new life into the world.

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> <p>
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "_Tadaima!_ Yo! Megumi? Where are you?" Sanosuke came in to the
house with Shinnosuke on his shoulders.
>>
>> "Sanosuke! We're back here!"
>>
>> "Kaoru? What are you doing he-" He entered the bedroom he shared
with his wife. Megumi was holding a squirming bundle to her breast.
>>
>> "_Okaerinasai_," Megumi whispered in a tired voice.
>>
>> "You had the baby?!? I was gone for 3 hours, tops. You had the
baby?" Sano was totally shocked. He couldn't speak for a few minutes,
just open and close his mouth. When Shinnosuke finally began
squirming to be let down, he woke from his stupor. He lowered his son
down and turned to examine his wife closer, his face took on a look
of concern. "Are you okay? Nothing went wrong?"
>>
>> "Yes. Kaoru had stopped by for a visit just in time." Sano turned
to look at Kaoru, who was rocking a squirming bundle of her own.
>>
>> "It was wonderful, Sanosuke. Messy and bloody, but beautiful!" She
grinned at him with tears in her eyes. "I'm glad that I was here to
experience this."
>>
>> Then he looked back at his wife. He counted in his head. Then he
used his fingers, just to make sure.
>>
>> "T-Two?!?"
>>
>> "Yes, darling. You were right. We have a boy. AND a girl." Megumi
grinned tiredly. "Next time, you're doing the work!" But Sano didn't
hear the last part of Megumi's tired announcement. He promptly passed
out.
>>
>> "Oh my. It looks like we managed to surprise 'touchan big time."
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Go to

> Part 4<a>

4. introductions and promises

A New Era: Part 4 -- Introductions and Promises

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> **
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> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era
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>
> All characters I create belong to me.
> Notes:
 oniichan: Older brother. Shinnosuke can't say the "n"
so he leaves it off. ^_~
>akachan: Baby/-ies
>
> Revised on 12/09/98
>Updated with new revisions: 0216/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth
>
> Enjoy!
>Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
<http://www.hanabatake.com>
>
> **A New Era: Part 4 -- Introductions and Promises**
>
>> It took a long while for Sanosuke to recover from his shock. He
lay sprawled on the floor of their bedroom with their 3-year-old
crawling all over him, trying to rouse him. Megumi merely laughed at
her fallen spouse. It wasn't every day that her husband fainted. The
shock must have been too much.
>>
>> There was no waking him from his swoon. Shinnosuke wanted his
father up to see meet his new brother and sister, who were quietly
being fed by their mother. He tried everything from shoving at his
prone form to pulling at his pointy hair, but to no avail.
>>
>> "'Kachan... Why is 'touchan sweeping? He won't wake up and see the
babies," Shin-chan pouted. He was very excited about his new
siblings. His mother and father had explained that he was getting a
new brother or sister, but now he had two instead of one.
>>
>> "Shin-chan. Your father is just resting," Megumi said dryly. And
resting and resting. The look on his face when he realized that there
were two babies was so precious. But then, no one was expecting two
bundles of joy.
>>
>> Now that she thought about it, she had been very big when she was
carrying them. She had just assumed that she was just having a big
baby. Sanosuke was not the smallest of men. He stood very tall
compared to a lot of the population of Tokyo. Shin-chan had been big
when she carried him, too. Therefore the baby inside her, she
reasoned, was bound to be big. She didn't count on there being two
small ones. Twins usually came early, too, explaining her early
labor.
>>
>> When he finally revived from his faint, he remained on the ground,
shaking his head in disbelief. "Twins....," he repeated before finally
getting up.
>>
>> He scooted over to the futon where his wife lay, the sleeping
babies beside her, and bent over to kiss her passionately. Kaoru took
Shinnosuke by his little hand and led him out of the room to give his
parents a bit of privacy.
>>
>> "Oh. That was nice, Sanosuke," she grinned weakly. "But that's
what got us in this situation in the first place."
>>
>> "Woman, that's not what got us in this situation. In a couple of
weeks, when you feel up to it, I'll remind you what got us in this
situation," he replied wickedly.
>>

>> "Sanosuke..." She couldn't believe how lucky she was sometimes. Life could have turned out so different.

>>

>> She thought back to the beginning, when they first met. He and Kenshin had saved her back then. She remembered when she tried to kill herself. Sano had stopped her before she could plunge the short sword into her chest, grabbing the blade with his hand, cutting his own flesh. She had been so close to doing it. So close.

>>

>> He yelled at her for being stupid. He made her think about what was really important in life. If he had not done that, she would not be here. She was thankful every day for him.

>>

>> "I'm so happy. I love you," he whispered rawly against her lips. He moved back to stare at her beautiful face. She smiled back at him with that smile that made his guts twist. She made him feel things so strongly. He didn't know what he would do if she was not in his life.

>>

>> "Damn it, woman. I know you're good, but you don't have to rub it in. I go away for a couple of hours and you pop out twins." For a second, his face looked a little sad. "Baby, I wasn't even here to hold your hand while you were hurting..."

>>

>> "Sanosuke..." Megumi move up to kiss him softly. "I love you so much. I know that you will always be there for me. I know you wanted to be here with us, but these little ones didn't want to wait." She reached out to touch his face lovingly.

>>

>> "So, are you going to introduce me?" he said with a wry grin.

>>

>> "Sagara Sanosuke, come meet the new additions to our family," Megumi whispered as she lifted up the fragile bundles one by one to introduce them to their father. "We have to think of names. This is our son. He's older by a few minutes."

>>

>> Sanosuke looked down at his newest children. His son looked a lot like Shinnosuke. He had a full head of hair which was already starting to point up, the exact color of his mother's. He yawned and began to fuss, moving fretfully. When Sano rubbed his finger near his mouth, he automatically began to nuzzle against it.

>>

>> "Hungry again, already? Heh, just like your old man," said Sano with a proud grin. Sanosuke gently gave his son over to Megumi to feed. "And this must be our youngest..."

>>

>> Sano looked at his daughter. A daughter. He didn't know the first thing about how to take care of little girls. She looked even smaller and much more delicate than her brother. She was so beautiful.

>>

>> He could see Megumi in her small face. She, too, had a head full of hair, but it was his dark brown instead of Megumi's deep black. She even had Megumi's lips. Geesh, he was going to have to be on guard when the boys came around her when she was older. He began to sweat at the thought.

>>

>> "Megumi-chan..."

>>

>> "Hmmm?"

>>

>> "Thank you. For being with me and loving me."
>>
>> "Sanosuke. Falling in love with you was one of the best things
that ever happened to me."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> Kaoru and Shinnosuke sat in the front of the house, watching the
sun set. The little boy was, for once, very still. It was a sight
that few had ever witnessed. Shinnosuke was already known around the
neighborhood for having a typhoon's worth of energy.
>>
>> Kaoru hoped that he wasn't starting to become jealous of his new
brother and sister. He looked a little pensive, reminding her of
Sanosuke when he was trying to think deep thoughts. It was very cute
to see the look of utter concentration on his little face.
>>
>> "Kaoru-neecha," he said finally. He looked like he had come to a
decision.
>>
>> "Hmm?"
>>
>> "Shin's goin' to be a good oniicha."
>>
>> "Yes, Shin-chan," whispered Kaoru, gathering the little boy in her
arms to hug him. "You are going to be the very best oniichan around."

>>
>> "Shin's goin' to help 'em and protect 'em always. 'Cuz the
akachan awre wittle."
>>
>> "Shin-chan. They are very lucky babies," whispered Kaoru against
the little boy's hair. "And when Kenshin and I have our baby, you can
help him or her, too."
>>
>> She held him and whispered to him until he nodded off to sleep,
about all the fun he was going to have as an older brother and how
proud everyone was that he was going to be there for the other
children as the sun set on the eventful day.

Go to

> [Part 5](rknew05.html)

5. sunsets and celebrations

A New Era: Part 5-- Sunsets and Celebrations-- LEMON VERSION

** Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era **** **
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sale or profit.
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> Note:
 Japanese:
> Sessha no tenshi: My Angel (a la Kenshin)
> Omedetou de gozaru: Congratulations (a la Kenshin). Usually
said _omedetou gozaimasu_ or _omedetou_.
> Oyasumi: Good night
> Thank you to Neka for the encouragement and the editing. And also

to Angela-sama! Tehe, its up now! Bahahahaha. Ahem. Too many romance novels.
 Revised: 12/14/98

> Updated with new revisions: 0220/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
 http://www.hanabatake.com

A New Era: Part 5 - Sunsets and Celebrations - Lemon Version
>

> Kenshin arrived at Megumi and Sanosuke's house just after sunset to walk his wife home. She and Megumi were probably busy talking about stuff. And Kaoru was mostlikely helping around their house, since Megumi was due soon.

>
> "Kenshin." Kaoru was sitting on the wooden porch in front of the house. Shinnosuke sat on her lap, cradled against her, fast asleep. There was such a warm glow in her eyes. She was full of so much love and understanding. It was one of the qualities that had drawen him to her. Light and dark. She looked like an angel. _Sessha no tenshi._

>
> "Kaoru." She looked so beautiful, holding Shin-chan against her protectively. She smiled at him and he felt his heart twist. She had always been able to make him feel so much at once. From the moment she stopped him in the middle of the streets of Tokyo so long ago, she became the center of his life. She was independent and vulnerable, wise and naive. There were so many sides to her and he loved every one of them.

>
> Kaoru looked so slight. He found it hard to believe that she was carrying a new life inside of her slim body. The baby inside of her was draining her energy, tiring her. He wanted to carry her around on a cushion for the next 8 months. Wrapped in silk. Protected and totally coddled.

>
> "Something amazing happened today." she said with a smile. Shinnosuke slowly began to awaken, blinking at Kenshin owlishly. He moved to help her rise from her position with Shinnosuke still in her arms.

>
> "Yeah," said the little boy on a yawn. "Amazn'...." He looked so much like a chibi-Sanosuke that Kaoru fought hard not to smile at his actions. She wondered what the baby inside her was going to look like. She was hoping for a small version of Kenshin.

>
> "Amazing?" Kenshin looked to his wife, who just smiled even more mysteriously. Suddenly, she reached out with her free hand and grabbed him.

>
> "Come on, Kenshin. You have to see for yourself," she said with a grin, dragging her husband in her wake.

>
> "Oro~?" gasped Kenshin as he was tugged unceremoniously into the house.

>

>

> *****

>

> "You gave birth? You went into labor? Today?" he asked Megumi. He couldn't keep the shock out of his voice. Megumi lay on a futon, looking a touch paler than usual, but as beautiful as always. "With

only Kaoru to help you?!"

>

> "Yes, well, she was very helpful," she replied with a small smile. "Gensai-sensei and I both thought that I had time before I was going to go into labor. That's why they decided to visit his sister this week," she explained.

>

> "Nothing went wrong?" he asked worriedly.

>

> "No. Everything went well. At least, now Kaoru knows what will happen when her turn comes."

>

> "Megumi-dono. Omedetou de gozaru."

>

> "Arigatou, Kenshin. Sano should be coming in so we can introduce you."

>

> As if on cue, Sanosuke came in holding a baby. The infant in his arms looked very small against his large form. Kenshin was happy for his best friend.

>

> "Omedetou, Sano."

>

> "Heh. Arigatou, Kenshin." He looked very proud. The grin on his face was full of pure joy. "Yahiko was right yesterday about Megumi being ready to burst."

>

> "Yahiko said that?" Kaoru asked, coming in with another baby in her arms. This one looked just as small as the first. "That boy needs to learn to be more polite. Tsubame should try to train him, already!"

>

> Kenshin fell over. "Oro~! T-T-Twins? With only Kaoru to help?"

>

> "Believe me, Ken-san... They did not want to wait," said Megumi with a soft smile. "Since these two surprised us, we have to think of names for them."

>

> "Kenshin, meet our new daughter and son," Sano ordered with a grin. "This is our daughter. She's the younger one." The baby in his arms looked so much like Megumi, it was uncanny.

>

> "And this is the boy," added Kaoru. "He looks like Shin-chan, doesn't he?"

>

> "Ken-niicha." Shinnosuke pulled at Kenshin's hakama, his face serious with new responsibility. "Shin's really an oniicha now."

>

> Kenshin kneeled to the same level as the toddler, meeting him eye to eye. "You are, aren't you? That's a very big responsibility. I'm sure that you're going to do your best helping your okaasan and otousan and the babies."

>

> "Yeah. Shin's gonna be 'specially 'sponsible," he replied in a serious tone. "They awre berry smawl. Shin has to pwotect 'em."

>

> "I'm sure that you're going to do a good job."

>

> "Uh huh. Shin will. Kaoru-neecha says so," Shinnosuke lisped, reaching his arms out, wrapping them around Kenshin's neck, silently

asking to be carried. Kenshin obliged with a grin. Shinnosuke may be the older brother now, but every now and then he still wanted to be babied a little.

>
> "She did, huh?"
>
> The little boy nodded vigorously. "Yeah. Kaoru-neecha says so."
>
> "And she's always right?" asked Sanosuke wryly.
>
> The little boy just grinned at his father.
>
> "No comment, huh?" Sano grinned back at his son. "Heh, smart kid."

>
> To that Megumi replied, "He gets that from my side of the family."

>

>

> *****

>

> Kenshin was thinking about babies and births as they walked back to the dojo. Kaoru seemed so slight and small. Would she be all right? Megumi was taller and more sturdy than Kaoru. Kenshin began to really worry about what was going to happen. He didn't want to lose her.

>

> Kenshin seemed to be in deep thought as they walked back to the dojo. Kaoru, sensing that he was pensive, didn't push for a conversation. They walked together in silence until they reached home.

>

> "_Oi!_ Kenshin! Kaoru! Where have you guys been?" Yahiko yelled from the house.

>

> "We were at Megumi and Sanosuke's place. Megumi had the babies today."

>

> "I told you she was ready to explode. Wait a minute. Did you say bab_ies_? Plural?" he ask incredulously.

>

> "Yes," Kenshin replied with a smile. "Kaoru delivered them. By herself."

>

> "She had the babies. And Kaoru delivered them. All by herself..." His voice trailed off. He thought they were kidding at first, but they were obviously not. "Two..."

>

> "A girl and a boy. Shinnosuke is really excited. I was worried that he might get jealous of them. But he's already really protective of them," added Kaoru.

>

> "A boy and a girl? Megumi and Sanosuke are going to be run ragged by all those kids," Yahiko said with a grin. "I can't wait."

>

> "Yahiko!"

>

> "What?" he asked, trying to look innocent.

>

> Kaoru stood over her student, her face looking more than a little threatening. "Guess who's gonna help out?"

>
> "Heh. I got it," Yahiko conceded defeat quickly. He was only teasing anyhow. He looked forward to babysitting with Tsubame.
"Anyway, I'm off to bed. _Oyasumi_."
>
> "Brat," Kaoru said with a soft smile. She turned her attention back to Kenshin. "Kenshin, what's wrong? Kenshin!" She poked his shoulder to get his attention.
>
> "Oro~," he mumbled. "Gomen, Kaoru...."
>
> "Kenshin, what's wrong?" she asked, moving closer to him.
>
> "Kaoru." He hugged her close to him, breathing in her scent. "I was just thinking about you having the baby. Going through labor. Maybe its silly, but I'm a little scared. Women die during childbirth. Too many times."
>
> "Kenshin. Don't worry. Everything will be fine. I'm really strong. Really. Women have babies every day. Look at Megumi. She came through just fine."
>
> "I know, but I can't help it." He was shaking. "I'm afraid that I might lose you."
>
> Kaoru moved forward to kiss him, holding him tightly to her.
"Himura Kenshin, you are never going to lose me. I have you now and I'm not ever going to let you go."
>
> "Never, huh?"
>
> "Yeah. Never ever." She kissed him again. "Come on, let's go. I feel like celebrating again." She winked at him as she led him off to bed.
>
> *****
>
> Kenshin slid the door shut behind them after they entered their bedroom. Kaoru lit the lamp. In the soft glow, she looked over at him with a smile of invitation on her lips.
>
> "Kenshin. You know what?" she asked, her eyes twinkling.
>
> "What?" Her husband still looked preoccupied. Kaoru wanted all his attention focused on her. And she thought she knew just how to get it.
>
> "You really shouldn't worry. I mean, I'm a strong girl. You know that." She moved towards him, her hips slowly swaying as she walked.
"I've been training since I was a child. Physically, I can out do a lot of people." She reached him and began to remove the tie that held his hair back. She loved to see the long strands down around his face. She reveled in the fact that only she had the right to touch him.
>
> "Kaoru..." Kenshin closed his eyes as he felt her run her fingers through the soft strands, leaving a tingling trail in their wake.
"I-" She stopped his words with her lips.
>
> Kenshin gave into her silent demand, pulling her closer to him. Her

body fit against him like she was made for him. For him and him alone. She rubbed against him, arousing him, seducing him. No matter how many times he held her in his arms, he never had enough. He could never have enough. Their mouths moved against each other, demanding and pursading.

>

> She moved his hand and placed it on her arm, flexing her muscle for him. "See, I have a lot of strength..." She moved to kiss him again, her mouth busy nibbling at his. He shuddered and pulled her closer to him. Kaoru pulled back, kissing him softly as she began to undress. "You know how much endurance I have," she said in a teasing whisper. "I can keep up with you when we make love."

>

> She deftly unknotted the obi, untwining the long cloth wrapped about her waist in seconds. The sound of silk rustling against silk seemed so loud as he watched her graceful movements. Her kimono fell open, revealing her creamy flesh. She let the obi drop to the floor. She reached back to untie her hair, the stretching movement drawing Kenshin's eyes to her body. Kaoru shivered at the hunger in his gaze. The tight control Kenshin held over himself always amazed her. She loved making him lose that control, loved that she could make him lose it.

>

> Kenshin watched his wife move toward him again. She was seducing him with her movements. Trying to make him forget his worries. And she was doing a good job at it.

>

> "Kaoru, you are so beautiful," he whispered in awe. He was so lucky that she loved him. She could have had any man she wanted, but she had chosen him. He had thought that he was too old, and had seen too much to be worthy of her, but she chose him anyway.

>

> "You make me feel like the most beautiful woman on the face of this earth." She paused inches away from him, reaching out to take his hand. "Help me take the rest off," she ordered in a hushed voice as she placed his hand on the open edge of the silk cloth.

>

> Kenshin slowly moved the silk off her body, watching as the cloth slipped off her body and fell in a pile at her feet. Her white form glowed in the lamp light. Her breasts were already changing, growing fuller. For the baby, he thought as his hands moved to cup them gently. Their baby. He moved down to her stomach and ran his hand over the place where their child rested within her. She hadn't changed there yet, but she would soon. The thought aroused him even more. _She's so beautiful._ He kissed her stomach lightly.

>

> "Your turn," Kaoru whispered, pulling at the top of his red kimono, drawing him closer so that she could undress him faster. She pulled at the ties of his hakama, loosening them so she could pull his top loose. She dropped kisses on his shoulders and chest as she removed it, pushing the cloth off his shoulders. His skin was so warm.

>

> Kenshin moved her towards their futon, his own hands busy caressing and massaging her flesh. She felt like silk. Kenshin reached up and untied her hair. He breathed in her scent, the smell of fresh jasmine and her own unique scent went to his head. She busily removed his clothing, pausing to let him step out of his hakama. She smiled at him and kissed him again. He stopped her teasing kisses, cupping her face with her hands to bring her forward to him. His lips conveyed to her his lust and his love.

>

> "Kenshin, have I ever told you how much I love your hands?" she asked breathlessly, bringing them to her breasts. He smiled at her and gently laid her back until she was on the futon.

>

> "I knew you married me for something. But I didn't think it was for my hands." He grinned at her, moving forward. His hair fell in a curtain around their faces. Kaoru reached up to tuck his hair behind his ears. "My cooking, maybe....my hands, no."

>

> Kaoru pouted, then smiled wickedly. She brought his right hand to her mouth and began to kiss it, running her lips over the calluses. She looked into his eyes as she took his forefinger and brought it into her mouth to suckle.

>

> "Gods," Kenshin muttered, pulling his hand away from her to kiss her lips. They were red, swelled from their earlier kisses. They were utterly irresistible.

>

> Kaoru closed her eyes, moving her hands up and down his back as they made love to each other with their mouths. She needed him so much. He made her feel so much. She needed to touch him, bring him closer to her.

>

> Kaoru whimpered as he moved down to suckle on her breasts. The pregnancy was making them tender and ultra-sensitive. His lips on her were driving her mad. At her mewing cries, he kissed her lower, tasting the heart of her, his wicked fingers teasing her to madness. His lips.... "Ken...shin...." she moaned, moving restlessly against him. She pressed him closer to her. His hands danced all over her body. She reached out, touching him back. He felt so solid...hot.

>

> Kenshin looked down at his wife. Her eyes were closed as she savored every touch...every sensation. She opened them and smiled up at him, making his heart stop. He loved her so much. She began to press kisses all over him, her hands touching him, making him moan. She touched him lightly, stroking, teasing with her fingertips. Her lips followed the trail her fingers paved. His fingers tangled in her hair, coming down to cup her face. She understood the look in his eyes.

>

> "Kaoru..." His eyes were burned her.

>

> "It's okay. Please...Don't hold back." She was driving him mad. "Kenshin, I need you...." she moaned. Kenshin reacted to the need in her voice... He moved over her, positioning himself. Their eyes met in the soft light. He wound his fingers with hers as he moved forward, making them one.

>

> "I love you," he moaned. His hair fell over them, blocking out the light. The world shrank down to just the two of them as they made love, reveled in it. He tried to be gentle, tried to hold back, but Kaoru would not let him. She knew him too well, knew where to touch, when to move away. They hurried toward madness, moving with unrestrained hunger. Kaoru knew that they were leaving marks on each other, but she didn't care. They could be gentle later. She felt ravenous.

>

> Kenshin moaned as she clenched around him. He heard her gasp as he grabbed her hips and pushed harder. She pushed at him and they rolled

so that she was above him. He ran his hands down her back and cupped her bottom, bringing her closer to him, then helping her move. There was no such thing as time as they moved against each other. Kenshin knew that he wasn't going to last much longer. Kaoru's eyes looked fevered as they met his. He understood. He turned so that she was once again under him. The sounds she was making drove him to move faster. He moved his hand down to touch her as he moved forward. Kaoru gasped and then moaned as she climaxed. Kenshin followed, groaning into her mouth as she pulled him over the edge with her. He relaxed against her, shifting his weight so that she didn't feel crushed, sighing in contentment.

>

> "See. You don't have to worry, Kenshin. I'm not going to break." She kissed his collarbone, then licked it gently. "I'm fine. We'll be fine."

>

> "Kaoru," he said in a raw, hushed voice, "I love you so much." He tightened his hold on her. She kissed him, holding him just as tight. She suddenly moved, rolling on top of him.

>

> "Yeah?" she asked with a grin. "That's good because I love you, too. You feel up to showing me again?"

>

> Kenshin laughed. Only Kaoru. "I'm always up to a challenge," he said, bringing her face down to kiss her. "This time, you do all the work."

>

> Go to

> Part 6

6. hoshi no hi - star day

A New Era: Part 5 -- Sunsets and Celebrations

> **

>

> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era

>

> **

>

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>

> All characters I create belong to me.

> Note:

>

> Japanese:

> Sessha no tenshi: My Angel (a la Kenshin)

> Omedetou de gozaru: Congratulations (a la Kenshin). Usually said _omedetou gozaimasu_ or _omedetou_.

> Oyasumi: Good night

>

> Revised on 12/09/98

> Updated with new revisions: 0220/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth

>

> Enjoy!

> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
 http://www.hanabatake.com

>
> **A New Era: Part 5 - Sunsets and Celebrations**
>
>> Kenshin arrived at Megumi and Sanosuke's house just after sunset to walk his wife home. She and Megumi were probably busy talking about stuff. And Kaoru was mostlikely helping around their house, since Megumi was due soon.
>>
>> "Kenshin." Kaoru was sitting on the wooden porch in front of the house. Shinnosuke sat on her lap, cradled against her, fast asleep. There was such a warm glow in her eyes. She was full of so much love and understanding. It was one of the qualities that had drawen him to her. Light and dark. She looked like an angel. _Sessha no tenshi._
>>
>> "Kaoru." She looked so beautiful, holding Shin-chan against her protectively.
>>
>> She smiled at him and he felt his heart twist. She had always been able to make him feel so much at once. From the moment she stopped him in the middle of the streets of Tokyo so long ago, she became the center of his life. She was independent and vulnerable, wise and naive. There were so many sides to her and he loved every one of them.
>>
>> Kaoru looked so slight. He found it hard to believe that she was carrying a new life inside of her slim body. The baby inside of her was draining her energy, tiring her. He wanted to carry her around on a cushion for the next 8 months. Wrapped in silk. Protected and totally coddled.
>>
>> "Something amazing happened today." she said with a smile. Shinnosuke slowly began to awaken, blinking at Kenshin owlishly. He moved to help her rise from her position with Shinnosuke still in her arms.
>>
>> "Yeah," said the little boy on a yawn. "Amazn'...." He looked so much like a chibi-Sanosuke that Kaoru fought hard not to smile at his actions. She wondered what the baby inside her was going to look like. She was hoping for a small version of Kenshin.
>>
>> "Amazing?" Kenshin looked to his wife, who just smiled even more mysteriously. Suddenly, she reached out with her free hand and grabbed him.
>>
>> "Come on, Kenshin. You have to see for yourself," she said with a grin, dragging her husband in her wake.
>>
>> "Oro~?" gasped Kenshin as he was tugged unceremoniously into the house.
> <p>
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "You gave birth? You went into labor? Today?" he asked Megumi. He couldn't keep the shock out of his voice. Megumi lay on a futon, looking a touch paler than usual, but as beautiful as always. "With only Kaoru to help you?!?"
>>
>> "Yes, well, she was very helpful," she replied with a small smile.

"Gensai-sensei and I both thought that I had time before I was going to go into labor. That's why they decided to visit his sister this week," she explained.

>>

>> "Nothing went wrong?" he asked worriedly.

>>

>> "No. Everything went well. At least, now Kaoru knows what will happen when her turn comes."

>>

>> "Megumi-dono. Omedetou de gozaru."

>>

>> "Arigatou, Kenshin. Sano should be coming in so we can introduce you."

>>

>> As if on cue, Sanosuke came in holding a baby. The infant in his arms looked very small against his large form. Kenshin was happy for his best friend.

>>

>> "Omedetou, Sano."

>>

>> "Heh. Arigatou, Kenshin." He looked very proud. The grin on his face was full of pure joy. "Yahiko was right yesterday about Megumi being ready to burst."

>>

>> "Yahiko said that?" Kaoru asked, coming in with another baby in her arms. This one looked just as small as the first. "That boy needs to learn to be more polite. Tsubame should try to train him, already!"

>>

>> Kenshin fell over. "Oro~! T-T-Twins? With only Kaoru to help?"

>>

>> "Believe me, Ken-san... They did not want to wait," said Megumi with a soft smile. "Since these two surprised us, we have to think of names for them."

>>

>> "Kenshin, meet our new daughter and son," Sano ordered with a grin. "This is our daughter. She's the younger one." The baby in his arms looked so much like Megumi, it was uncanny.

>>

>> "And this is the boy," added Kaoru. "He looks like Shin-chan, doesn't he?"

>>

>> "Ken-niicha." Shinnosuke pulled at Kenshin's hakama, his face serious with new responsibility. "Shin's really an oniicha now."

>>

>> Kenshin kneeled to the same level as the toddler, meeting him eye to eye. "You are, aren't you? That's a very big responsibility. I'm sure that you're going to do your best helping your okaasan and otousan and the babies."

>>

>> "Yeah. Shin's gonna be 'specially 'sponsible," he replied in a serious tone. "They awre berry smawl. Shin has to pwotect 'em."

>>

>> "I'm sure that you're going to do a good job."

>>

>> "Uh huh. Shin will. Kaoru-neecha says so," Shinnosuke lisped, reaching his arms out, wrapping them around Kenshin's neck, silently asking to be carried. Kenshin obliged with a grin. Shinnosuke may be the older brother now, but every now and then he still wanted to be

babied a little.

>>

>> "She did, huh?"

>>

>> The little boy nodded vigorously. "Yeah. Kaoru-neecha says so."

>>

>> "And she's always right?" asked Sanosuke wryly.

>>

>> The little boy just grinned at his father.

>>

>> "No comment, huh?" Sano grinned back at his son. "Heh, smart kid."

>>

>> To that Megumi replied, "He gets that from my side of the family."

> <p>

>>

>> *****

>>

>> Kenshin was thinking about babies and births as they walked back to the dojo. Kaoru seemed so slight and small. Would she be all right? Megumi was taller and more sturdy than Kaoru. Kenshin began to really worry about what was going to happen. He didn't want to lose her.

>>

>> Kenshin seemed to be in deep thought as they walked back to the dojo. Kaoru, sensing that he was pensive, didn't push for a conversation. They walked together in silence until they reached home.

>>

>> "_Oi!_ Kenshin! Kaoru! Where have you guys been?" Yahiko yelled from the house.

>>

>> "We were at Megumi and Sanosuke's place. Megumi had the babies today."

>>

>> "I told you she was ready to explode. Wait a minute. Did you say bab_ies_? Plural?" he ask incredulously.

>>

>> "Yes," Kenshin replied with a smile. "Kaoru delivered them. By herself."

>>

>> "She had the babies. And Kaoru delivered them. All by herself..." His voice trailed off. He thought they were kidding at first, but they were obviously not. "Two..."

>>

>> "A girl and a boy. Shinnosuke is really excited. I was worried that he might get jealous of them. But he's already really protective of them," added Kaoru.

>>

>> "A boy and a girl? Megumi and Sanosuke are going to be run ragged by all those kids," Yahiko said with a grin. "I can't wait."

>>

>> "Yahiko!"

>>

>> "What?" he asked, trying to look innocent.

>>

>> Kaoru stood over her student, her face looking more than a little threatening. "Guess who's gonna help out?"

>>
>> "Heh. I got it," Yahiko conceded defeat quickly. He was only teasing anyhow. He looked forward to babysitting with Tsubame.
"Anyway, I'm off to bed. _Oyasumi_."
>>
>> "Brat," Kaoru said with a soft smile. She turned her attention back to Kenshin. "Kenshin, what's wrong? Kenshin!" She poked his shoulder to get his attention.
>>
>> "Oro~," he mumbled. "Gomen, Kaoru...."
>>
>> "Kenshin, what's wrong?" she asked, moving closer to him.
>>
>> "Kaoru." He hugged her close to him, breathing in her scent. "I was just thinking about you having the baby. Going through labor. Maybe its silly, but I'm a little scared. Women die during childbirth. Too many times."
>>
>> "Kenshin. Don't worry. Everything will be fine. I'm really strong. Really. Women have babies every day. Look at Megumi. She came through just fine."
>>
>> "I know, but I can't help it." He was shaking. "I'm afraid that I might lose you."
>>
>> Kaoru moved forward to kiss him, holding him tightly to her.
"Himura Kenshin, you are never going to lose me. I have you now and I'm not ever going to let you go."
>>
>> "Never, huh?"
>>
>> "Yeah. Never ever." She kissed him again. "Come on, let's go. I feel like celebrating again." She winked at him as she led him off to bed.

Go to

> Part 6<a>

7. okaeri - welcome home

A New Era: Part 6 -- Hoshi no Hi (Star Day)

> **
>
> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era
>
> **
>
> Disclaimer All rights and privileges to Rurouni Kenshin belong to Nobuhiro Watsuki, Shueisha, Sony Music Entertainment, and associated parties. The characters are used without permission. This is a work of fiction and not written for sale or profit.
>
> All characters I create belong to me.
>
>
> Japanese Notes:
> Aho: Idiot
> Nani: What?

>
> Revised on 12/09/98
> Updated with new revisions: 0220/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth
>
> Enjoy!
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
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>
> **A New Era: Part 6 - _Hoshi no Hi _: Star Day **
>
>> "Kenshin? Where are you?" Kaoru stepped into the kitchen looking for her husband. He wasn't there, either. She had already searched the bedroom and the dojo's practice room. This was getting frustrating.
>>
>> "_Mou!_ Kenshin!" she muttered to herself. This wasn't like him. Lately he had taken to hovering very close by her. Since they had found out about the pregnancy, he had been watching her like a hawk, making sure she was okay. Why did he decide to sneak off now? They had to go to Megumi and Sanosuke's place soon. They were going to be late.
>>
>> "Yahiko? Have you seen Kenshin?"
>>
>> "Yeah. He's in the storage shed in the back. I think he's looking for something back there."
>>
>> "The storage shed?" she asked herself. Kaoru sighed in frustration. That was the one place she didn't look. What was he doing in there?
>>
>> "Kenshin? Are you in here? What are you doing?" she called out into the shadows. Her eyes hadn't quite adjusted to the lack of sunlight, but the room seemed empty. "Kenshin?" No one.
>>
>> Suddenly, she felt the presence of someone behind her. She tried to turn around, but a pair of strong arms stopped her. "Kenshin?"
>>
>> "Kaoru." He hugged her close to him. She relaxed against him. He always smelled so comforting to her. He smelled of... well, Kenshin.

>>
>> "What are you doing in here?" she asked, her eyes closed, savoring the feel of him.
>>
>> "Nothing really. Looking for things in here." Several storage chests were opened around the room. "But I keep getting distracted. I was thinking about the day I met you."
>>
>> "That day...." She turned in his arms to look into his eyes. The warm violet seemed to touch something in her soul. There was just something about his eyes.... They had fascinated her from the very beginning.
>>
>> "I was thinking about how everything has changed since that day. I would never have imagined any of this for me. That day, I was just trying to get through Tokyo without being noticed by anyone."
>>
>> "Kenshin." He leaned forward, holding her closer to him.
>>
>> "When you ran up to me on that road, yelling for me to wait,

yelling for Hitokiri Battousai to wait.... I thought, how does this child know who I was? Can she see what I really am?" He hugged her, his hand moving towards her belly. The slight swell was barely detectable. Their child was growing within her. God, he loved her.

>>

>> "I looked into your eyes that day and thought that they were so pure. Pure and good. And full of rage. An avenging angel. You were beautiful." They both smiled at the memory.

>>

>> Over time, Kaoru had learned the value of patience. It had been very foolhardy of her to rush out and confront a person, let alone a murderer on impulse. She had learned enough to know how to choose her fights carefully. Risking your life like that was careless and stupid.

>>

>> "I had to stop the killings. I had to stop Battousai. That was all I thought about...." She felt his arms tighten around her at that.

>>

>> "I know. I shudder to think what would have happened if you had actually found Gohei right away that day instead of me."

>>

>> "I think you would have found me if I had not found you. Maybe you would have heard the commotion." She smiled teasingly at him.

"Something would have drawn us together. I know it. There's a red string between us. Now, tell me what are you looking for in here?"

>>

>> "I was looking for that box of kimono that you told me about yesterday." She looked over to where he pointed. A box was open, revealing colorful kimono sized for a child.

>>

>> "Kimono? Ara, those are from when I was small. Aren't you getting ahead of yourself? The baby isn't due for another five and a half months," she said teasingly. "And even then, we don't know whether the baby will be a boy or a girl."

>>

>> "I wanted to be prepared," he replied with a soft smile. "We're going to have a daughter just like you."

>>

>> She smiled and kissed him quickly on the lips. "You sweet talker. You sound like Sanosuke, making predictions like that. I dunno. I'm kinda hoping for a miniature Ken-chan. Now, come on! We have to go to Megumi's. There's a party for Shin-chan tonight, remember?"

>>

>> "Oh yeah." He pulled her close again, kissing her until her cheeks were pinked. When he pulled back, they were both breathing a little harder than before. "How much time do we have?" he asked, his eyes glittering.

>>

>> "We definitely don't have enough for that," she replied, pouting. "Come on. No more distractions. Shin-chan will be disappointed if we don't hurry up and get there."

>>

>> "Too bad..." he said, grinning as he allowed his wife to lead him out of the room.

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "Tsubame." Yahiko took the tray she was holding from her. She grimaced and grabbed it back.

>>

>> "Hi, Yahiko. Is it time already?"

>>

>> "Yeah. We better get going. Kenshin and Kaoru said that they would meet us later at Sano's place."

>>

>> "Later, huh?"

>>

>> Yahiko shook his head and sighed. "Hey. I don't ask questions." Tsubame giggled at that.

>>

>> "Yahiko!" She grinned back at him.

>>

>> "Anyway, they're going to be a little late."

>>

>> They walked through the streets of Tokyo in companionable silence. Yahiko was used to being teased about his relationship with Tsubame. The facts were that they were friends. That was all. Just friends. Best friends.... But only friends. At least that's how it had been for five years. Yahiko had to keep telling himself that it would be stupid to try to change anything about it.

>>

>> Tsubame found a place in their family. In Kaoru and Megumi and Tae, she saw that she could be independent and strong. Tsubame was a lot less timid than she used to be. Yahiko was always there, as a friend. As a brother. To support her.

>>

>> Tsubame would always think of him as a brother.

>>

>> "Isn't it wonderful, though?"

>>

>> "Huh?" Yahiko shook his head to clear it. "What's wonderful?"

>>

>> "Everyone is having babies. Everyone is so happy."

>>

>> "It's great, Tsubame. They all deserve to be happy. All of us have gone through so much together."

>>

>> "I was thinking...."

>>

>> "About what?"

>>

>> "About.... Just about how everything has changed so much. I was thinking about what I want to do with my life. The world is changing so much."

>>

>> "What you want to do?"

>>

>> "Yeah. I... I've been reading a lot. I really want to.... Well, you know that the government has been building schools.... I want to go learn, Yahiko. Maybe about the West. I was thinking of studying English. And some more Dutch.... Maybe teaching others about it. Everyone is still so closed minded about some things here...."

>>

>> "Tsubame...."

>>

>> She stopped suddenly and turned to him. Her eyes were fierce. "Don't tell me I can't because I'm a girl, Yahiko."

>>
>> "I wasn't going to say that! Tsubame. You can do anything you want to. You know we will support you in it."
>>
>> "You will?" She suddenly looked as young and uncertain as the girl she was 5 years ago. Her voice was hesitant and shaky.
>>
>> "Tsubame. Japan is changing so much because of the West. If you want.... If you want to be part of that change. I'll be here for you."
>>
>> Tsubame smiled at him and leaned over, kissing him lightly on the cheek. "Thanks, Yahiko. You've always been there for me."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "Keiko and Seinosuke," Sano said with obvious satisfaction. He grinned at his sleeping babies. The only word that could describe him would be...content.
>>
>> "Eh? Keiko and SEInosuke?" Yahiko asked incredulously. He looked down at the sleeping babies and shook his head. Sano's hand could definitely be seen in the naming of the infants. Again.
>>
>> "Yeah. Those are the names Megumi-chan and I decided on. I think they'll suit them fine."
>>
>> "If you have another boy, another name with -nosuke might be hard to come by. There can't be that many more," Yahiko mumbled. Sanosuke rebutted by hitting the teen up side the head.
>>
>> "_Aho_," he muttered. "I still have a few left...." he muttered to himself.
>>
>> "Hey! I'm just stating a fact." He rubbed his head. "At the rate you two are going- Ow!" Yahiko moved out Sano's reach. "Keiko, eh?"

>>
>> "It's written as graceful child," Megumi said with a smile.
>>
>> "Cute name....," he said with a smile. He touched the baby's cheek gently and lowered his voice. "So let's see. Seinosuke. Written as clarity of the middle. Shinnosuke. Heart of the middle. Sanosuke. Middle of the stomach...."
>>
>> Yahiko couldn't dodge getting conked on the head again. He should have known that Sano could move fast when he wanted to. "Brat."
>>
>> "Just pointing out the facts... Geesh."
>>
>> "You two! Keep it down!" Tsubame scolded. The twins were beginning to stir from their nap. "See. Look what you did! You woke them up."

>>
>> "Yeah! Woke 'em up!" Shinnosuke repeated, nodding his head in agreement. He toddled over to help (or hinder) Tsubame in calming the newborns. "Dwon't cwy," he said soothingly, patting them softly like he watched his mother and father do so often.
>>
>> The pair had the decency to look a little sheepish. Being scolded

by Tsubame and Shinnosuke was not fun. And Yahiko definitely did not want Tsubame to be angry at him. Having Kaoru, Megumi and Tae as role-models, Tsubame had learned it was okay to express herself. In fact, she could be downright scary sometimes....

>>

>> "We'll be good," Yahiko promised, his eyes meeting Sanosuke's, ordering him to agree. Sano grinned at the teenager knowingly.

>>

>> "Heh. Sure," he replied. "We'll be very, very good from now on, Tsubame-chan."

>>

>> "Sa-nooo-suke," Yahiko grounded out, dragging him further away from Tsubame and the babies.

>>

>> Sanosuke merely blinked back innocently at him. Yahiko didn't believe that look for a second. "_Nani_? What's on your mind, brat?" He began to smile. "Or maybe I should ask WHO is on your mind."

>>

>> "Shut up!" Yahiko blushed furiously. He glanced quickly at Tsubame to see if she was listening to the conversation, but she was far enough away to miss the exchange.

>>

>> "Sano...." Megumi's voice came from behind, full of warning. "Stop it."

>>

>> "But Yahiko-chan is so cute when he's riled up," Sanosuke replied. He wasn't through teasing the teen yet.

>>

>> "Sano." He turned and grinned at his wife, kissing her on the nose.

>>

>> "Fine. I'll be good. For you." He turned around and winked at Yahiko. "And you should be good, too. I'm sure that we'll find out if you aren't. Somehow. And I don't think Tae would—" Sanosuke gasped, his eyes watering from Yahiko's sudden punch to his stomach. Yahiko's jab was really improving.

>>

>> "I told you, Sano." Megumi smiled serenely at the hunched form of her husband. "But you insisted." Sano grimaced in reply. Yahiko stalked off to where Tsubame and the children were. They watched as he talked quietly to Tsubame and joked with Shinnosuke.

>>

>> "He's growing up, Sano. He'll be turning 16 soon. And he has seen a lot in those years. And I think he's really getting sensitive about certain things. And Tsubame is one of them. They've always been close. And he has been protective of her for a long time."

>>

>> "Yeah, yeah! He's still a brat though."

>>

>> "Ah," she sighed, "Weren't you—"

>>

>> "I got it, woman! I'll stop it. I can be good, too." He bent over to kiss Megumi lightly on the mouth. "Say... How much longer do we have left to wait before—"

>>

>> "Hush!" She put her hand over his mouth. Sano's eyes were twinkling. She knew that look. "Is that all you can think about?" She looked up teasingly. "5 more. Weeks...." Sanosuke groaned. Megumi chuckled and walked off to help Tsubame change the children's clothes.

>>
>> "_Oi,_ Yahiko! Where are Kenshin and Kaoru?" Yakiko had Shinnosuke on his shoulders. He turned around at that question and walked towards Sano.
>>
>> "Those two? Kenshin asked me to go ahead of them. They should be coming soon." He had left them behind because he wanted to walk there alone with Tsubame. Where were they? Now that he thought about it, those two were late....
>>
>> "Ken-niicha? Ken-niicha and Kaoru-neecha awre coming! They pwromised!" Shinnosuke tried to wiggle down from Yahiko's shoulders, without regard to how far he was off the ground. "No fear," was already his motto.
>>
>> "Heh." Sano reached up to grab his son before he fell off Yahiko and onto the hard ground, tucking him neatly under his arm as if he were a sack. "Those two are probably- OW!"
>>
>> Megumi let go of this ear after a satisfying twist. "Sano. Not in front of the kids!"
>>
>> "I was going to say that they're probably going to pick you up something special, Shin-chan," he muttered, rubbing at his ear. "It's not my fault if you have that on your mind, Fox," he mumbled under his breath.
>>
>> Yahiko chucked, plucking Shin-chan from his precarious position in father's arms. He walked towards Tsubame, who was fanning the babies. She was humming a little song to them under her breath. Tsubame had just turned 15. She looked so cute, wearing her light blue yukata, her hair pulled back from her face. When she turned to smile at him.... Yahiko shook is head. They had known each other for years. He was going to ruin their friendship if he continued....
>>
>> "Yahiko-kun. What's wrong?"
>>
>> "Eh? N-Nothing. I was just thinking about what a nice day it is...."
>>
>> "Yahiko-niicha! Why awre you blwrushing?" Shinnosuke asked, patting at Yahiko's cheeks.
>>
>> "Shi- Shin-chan...." he half-groaned at Shinnosuke. The kid was going to give him away! Apparently he had inherited a lot more than looks from his father. Shin-chan merely smiled back innocently and continued to pat at Yahiko's cheeks.
>>
>> "Pwink! Yahiko-niicha all pwink!"
>>
>> "Thanks, Shin-chan. Thanks a lot. It's the sun," he explained lamely.
>>
>> "Are you all right, Yahiko?"
>>
>> "Y-Yeah. I'm fine." He rubbed at his hair self-consciously. Tsubame nodded, flashing a smile at him then turning to the children.
>>
>> Sano and Megumi watched the exchange from a distance. "See. I told

you," Megumi said, nodding to herself. "No matter how much Yahiko protests about how they're only friends he can't hide from our knowing eyes." She chuckled to herself.

>>

>> "Heh. They're just kids, Megumi."

>>

>> "Who are just kids?" Kaoru asked from behind the pair. "What are you talking about?"

>>

>> "Why were you two late?" Sano asked with a wicked grin. "Where's Kenshin?"

>>

>> We were not late because of what you're thinking, Sano!" Kaoru replied with a blush. "Actually, we were getting Shin-chan's gift ready."

>>

>> "I was right then. I told Shin-chan that you two were late because you were getting him his gift."

>>

>> Kenshin came in with a large wooden box. Yahiko and Tsubame carried the children over to them. Shin-chan jumped up and down with excitement.

>>

>> "Yah! Yah! What iz it?" His father crouched down to his level and grinned back at him. Sano caught his son on the way up on a jump, pulling him high on the momentum of it. Shin-chan laughed as he went up.

>>

>> "Open it for him, Kenshin," Kaoru said with a smile.

>>

>> Kenshin smiled, too, and opened the box to reveal a strange lamp, and books.

>>

>> "Kaoru. Kenshin. They're too much," Megumi said. "He's only 3. He won't need them yet."

>>

>> "Actually, most of the stuff is for later, but he can start using the lamp now. It's used to show the patterns of the stars on the ceiling at night," Kaoru said with a grin. "Since Shin-chan is going to be sleeping by himself soon. It will make it less lonely in his room as he goes to sleep," she explained to Megumi and Sanosuke.

>>

>> "The stawrs?" Shin-chan said in awe as he lifted up the lamp gently. It was darkened on all sides but the top. Blackened glass plates with clear spots were in a separate box. They fit on to the top of the box snugly.

>>

>> "Yes. Your 'kaachan and 'touchan can fix it so you can see the stars at night in your room," Kenshin said to the toddler.

>>

>> Shin-chan smiled and put his presents gently back into the box. "Shin-chan wir take cawre of it. Pwromise. _Domo-arigacho gosaimachu_!" He made a neat little bow, then ran off to play in the yard.

>>

>> The adults looked at each other, slightly stunned. "He gets that from my side of the family," Megumi offered in explanation, smiling at her son. He was full of surprises.

>>

>> *****

>>
>> The soft chirping of the cicada echoed in the night. Yahiko walked silently with Tsubame back to the Akabeko. It was always automatically assumed that Yahiko would walk Tsubame back. He always did it.
>>
>> "Tsubame." Yahiko stopped and to look up at the night sky. It was filled with stars. It was beautiful. He turned to face Tsubame.
>>
>> "What is it?"
>>
>> "Do you ever think about what it would be like if we never found everyone else?"
>>
>> "It would be awful."
>>
>> "Yeah. I was thinking. We are so lucky. The chances that we would end up growing up with these people as our family.... It's like one in as many stars in the sky."
>>
>> Tsubame looked up at the sky. She gasped softly at the sight of the sea of light. Her life had definitely not been bright before she had met these people. The future.... She owed so much to them.
>>
>> "But, that's what makes it so beautiful, Yahiko.... We are so lucky. We need to take what we have gained and use it as much as we can. We owe it to all of those who weren't so lucky, don't you think?"
>>
>> For a long while, they stood together in the dark, looking up at the night sky. The stars twinkled above them, unchangingly eternal.

Go to

> Part 7<a>

8. the darkest part of our hearts

A New Era: Part 7-- Okaeri (Welcome Home)

> **
>
> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era
>
> **
>
> Disclaimer All rights and privileges to Rurouni Kenshin belong to Nobuhiko Watsuki, Shuiesha, Sony Music Entertainment, and associated parties. The characters are used without permission. This is a work of fiction and not written for sale or profit.
>
> All characters I create belong to me.
> Notes:
 Thanks to Neka, Tae, Raya and Hikaru and to Rhona for looking this one over. I know it may still not be all correct, but I'm just writing for the joy of writing! (And so I can get the characters to do what I want! *mwahahaha!*)
>
> Japanese:
>tabi: Japanese-style socks.

>
> Revised on 12/09/98
>Updated with new revisions: 124/99 - Thanks to Amy Forsyth
>
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)

>
http://www.weblacker.com/ardith/
>
> **A New Era: Part 7-- _Okaeri_: Welcome Home**
>
>> "I'm fine, Yahiko! Stop fussing! _ Mou_, you would think that I was the first woman in the world to have a baby." Kaoru grimaced at the tone of her own voice. She rubbed her ever-expanding belly absently and sighed.
>>
>> Yahiko didn't even blink at Kaoru's short tirade. They had all been around Megumi when she was expecting. AND Sanosuke had taken them both aside right at the beginning to explain the changes Kaoru was going to experience in even more detail, giving them fair warning about what was going to happen in those next few months. They were totally prepared to humor her, much to Kaoru's frustration. She hated when people "humored" her.
>>
>> "Kaoru, we're just trying to help you. You'd think we're torturing you by the way you're acting." Kaoru was almost eight months along. And big. Her slim body looked as if she would tip over from the weight she carried before her. That was why Yahiko and Kenshin were so worried. Kaoru looked like she was going to burst. And while Yahiko took great pleasure in torturing Kenshin by mouthing "twins" whenever they were all together, looking down at Kaoru it looked like a fair possibility.
>>
>> Kaoru had always been so slight. She was smaller than Kenshin and even slimmer. During the first few months of pregnancy, she had lost weight rather than gained because of morning sickness. They both tried to make her rest, but for almost eight months, she had defied them at every turn. But then, if she had just given in, she wouldn't be Kaoru. She just complained about being smothered by them and turned around and did what she wanted. At least Kenshin got her to stop teaching classes at four months by getting Megumi to talk to her about over-exertion.
>>
>> "Sorry. I don't know why I'm so...so grumpy today. I guess it's just the weather. It's so cold. It's making my back ache." The air was crisp with winter's chill. Snow covered everything, dusting the world in white.
>>
>> "That's why I keep tellin' you to come inside. Now come on. Or do I have to carry that huge body of yours?" he teased. Yahiko could probably do it, too. He was surprised, though, when she didn't retaliate against his comments about her size. Kaoru would usually at least glare at him for size remarks.
>>
>> "Okay. Everything just looks so beautiful in winter."
>>
>> "Kaoru...." He looked at her expectantly. She looked like she was preparing to argue with him, just to be contrary, but she gave in gracefully.
>>
>> "Coming, 'touchan,'" she grumbled. She really felt like a child

whenever they did this. But she knew they meant well.

>>

>> "And it looks like it's gonna snow again soon. You should be ashamed of yourself, young lady! You don't want to catch a cold, do you? Not in your condition." Yahiko looked up at the gray sky and tsked. Kaoru laughed at him and waddled back inside to get warm.

>>

>> "Kaoru, I made some tea." Kenshin was kneeling at the table in the main room. Kaoru sighed with pleasure as Kenshin helped her down. She took a sip of the hot tea, letting the heat seep through to her toes. She wiggled them appreciatively in her tabi. At least while she was sitting, she could see her feet. That made her feel a little better. Only a little bit, though. She rested her cup of tea on her belly. The baby kicked at the additional warmth.

>>

>> "Oooh. That's wonderful. Thank you, Kenshin," Kaoru said, sighing appreciatively again.

>>

>> "Well, my mission's complete. I'm off to the Akabeko. Don't wait up." Yahiko gathered a heavy winter jacket to wear over his gi and hakama.

>>

>> "If the snow really starts coming down, you should stay over there," Kaoru said, worriedly. The clouds looked more ominous now as the sky was darkening. "I don't want you trying to get through a storm."

>>

>> "Okay. If I need to, I'll stay." It was no chore for him. That way, he could spend more time with Tsubame. "If that happens, I'll see you two tomorrow."

>>

>> "Kaoru.... Are you okay?" Kenshin looked at his wife closely. Her cheeks were slightly flushed. He helped her get to her feet.

>>

>> "Huh? Oh, I'm fine. I'm just a little achy. I think it's the weather. And the little one seems to be really active today." Kaoru smiled, taking his hand to where the baby kicked actively against her. "Oh, that was a good one," she spoke quietly to their baby. "You're so strong."

>>

>> "Hmmm. Maybe you should go lie down. Megumi said you should be resting anyway."

>>

>> "Maybe....," Kaoru replied quietly. Kenshin stared after her as she walked to their room.

>>

>> The various aches that came with pregnancy seemed to be magnified by the storm. That was the only reason that Kaoru could come up with to ease her mind about the pains that she was experiencing. There was no way that she could be in labor. It was too early. And, she thought as she stared out at the falling snow, a storm was going to make it impossible to get help.

>>

>> The baby gave an obliging kick to remind her of his presence. "You are going to be a handful, aren't you?" she whispered at him, closing her eyes. "And you just can't wait to come out....and I really would like to see my feet without having to sit down to do it," she said wistfully.

>>

>> *****

>>
>> "Kenshin." Kaoru's voice came through to him across the barrier of dreams. He opened his eyes, coming fully awake instantly, turning to his wife. Her beautiful face was wet with tears.
>>
>> "Kaoru? What's wrong?" He rubbed away the tears with the edge of her sleeping kimono, looking down worriedly at her face. She merely smiled back at him, her eyes glittering with emotion. "Kaoru?"
>>
>> "The baby moved." She took his hand and placed it over their child. She had awakened with a silvery sensation tickling her from within. Their baby. Kaoru was almost four and a half months along. She smiled when she heard Kenshin gasp. The baby was moving, for the first time letting his or her presence be known to them. "Kenshin, our baby."
>>
>> The smile that he gifted her with took her breath. "Kaoru..." He buried his face in the crook of her neck, breathing in her scent. Jasmine and Kaoru. "I can't say it too many times, can I?" Under his fingers, the baby fluttered again.
>>
>> "Huh?" she asked, her voice soft as the first rays of morning began to break through. "What can't you say too many times?"
>>
>> "I love you. I'll never be able to tell you how much. No matter how many times I tell you, I can never express how much I do."
>>
>> "Kenshin...."
>>
>> "You are everything to me, Kaoru. You gave me everything."
>>
>> "Shhh. Kenshin." She turned to him, pushing his fine red locks away from his face. "If you never came into my life, Himura Kenshin..... I think I would have lived a very sad and lonely existence." He shook his head at those words. She was wrong. If he hadn't come along, she would have been fine. Kaoru was person who naturally attracted goodness. No, Kaoru would have been fine without him.
>>
>> "Kaoru...." She took his hand to her lips, kissing it softly. She brought him to her belly again.
>>
>> "Say good morning to your 'touchan,'" Kaoru whispered softly to their baby.
>>
>> "_Ohayou_," Kenshin whispered as the baby fluttered.
"_Ohayou...._"
>>
>> *****
>>
>> Kaoru closed her eyes against the pain. Kenshin would definitely be worried if she said anything. But she couldn't stay quiet about this. She was going to have the baby. And soon. The storm outside was quietly raging. There was no way that they could get Megumi over here. Not in that weather. Now what did Megumi do in the beginning? Walk? That was supposed to help.
>>
>> "Why couldn't you wait to be born?" she asked the baby, rubbing her stomach comfortingly. She sucked in air as another pain hit her. The pains were coming so close together. Wasn't it too early? _Gods._

"I take that feet comment back!"

>>

>> She reached down to untie her obi. She had to prepare, either which way. She hoped that Kenshin would be up to delivering their child. He would have to do it. No one else could.

>>

>> "Kenshin," she called out softly. She didn't want to alarm him, but she needed help. Now.

>>

>> "Kaoru? Are you in here?" Kenshin paled when he saw her. She was half dressed and wincing in pain. He looked down at the pool of water and blood at her feet. "Y-You're in l-l-labor?"

>>

>> "Yes....My water broke.... The baby is coming." She suddenly felt calm. They would get through all of this. She totally trusted Kenshin.

>>

>> "K-K-Kaoru!" His hands were shaking. Kaoru took them in her hands and put them on her belly.

>>

>> "I guess you're going to have to deliver our baby, Kenshin."

>>

>> *****

>>

>> _I promise never to touch her again! Just please let her survive. Please let her survive. _Kenshin didn't know who he was praying to. It didn't matter, he just hoped someone was listening.

>>

>> Women died in labor all the time. No matter how many times Kaoru had tried to reassure him, he couldn't get that fact out of his head. Having their baby might kill her. AND they were trapped in a snow storm. There was no way to get help if anything happened.

>>

>> "Kenshin," her voice shook him from his dark thoughts. "I'm going to be fine. I helped Megumi do this before, remember?" Kenshin tried to swallow his panic. It wouldn't help Kaoru at all.

>>

>> "But this is totally different! Kaoru, there's no one here who knows what to do in case of any real trouble. Oro~!" he exclaimed as she tightened her grip on his hand. The pains were coming closer together.

>>

>> "Don't worry. I'll be fine. No one in my family ever died giving birth," she panted, trying to ease the pains. "I'm not about to be the first one," she smiled reassuringly at her husband, her breath coming in sharp gasps. "Now go get some hot water ready. You'll need it afterwards. It might be a bit messy...."

>>

>> "Kaoru, you better not die on me," he whispered, his voice roughened with emotion.

>>

>> "Not me, Kenshin. I would never do that to you, remember?" She kissed him softly. "Now we have some work to do."

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "Kenshin," Kaoru moaned softly. The pressure was incredible. She felt like she was being ripped apart. She fought down the urge to scream. It would just make Kenshin more nervous. "I'm **not** letting you near me for at least....6 weeks," she smiled tiredly at him.

>>
>> Kenshin wiped the sweat from her face. "This is all my fault."
>>
>> "If I remember correctly, I do recall there being two of us....I could be wrong though," she teased. Another pain came. She gasped, gripping Kenshin's already bruised hand. She would not cry. She would not cry. She focused all her energy into bringing this new life into the world.
>>
>> "Kaoru. We are not doing this again. You are not going to suffer like this again." Kaoru merely smiled. She kissed the hand she was holding gently.
>>
>> "Kenshin, you should have seen Megumi when she was going through labor. I do believe she had a few choice words about Sanosuke," Kaoru laughed at the memory. Megumi was not happy with Sanosuke at the time. Kaoru was even having some dark thoughts about Kenshin, but she thought that saying them would just make him feel even worse. The next one, though, he was going to get it! "The pain....it's nothing in comparison to what we get in the end."
>>
>> "Kaoru." He loved her so much. He would rather die than lose her.

>>
>> "This is happening really fast, isn't it?" she asked contemplatively. The pains were really close together and it had been eight hours. She knew from helping Megumi that once the pains came this close together, the time was near. Megumi told her that first babies usually took a long time. Sometimes all day or even longer.

>>
>> "Oro? Fast? It feels like forever." Kenshin looked at the clock that sat in the corner of the room. It was barely midnight.
>>
>> "The baby will be here soon....," she sucked in air to compensate for the pain that came crashing from within. "It's almost over."
>>
>> "S-S-Soon?"
>>
>> "Yessssss! DAMMIT THAT HURT!!!" she screamed. She couldn't hold back for that one. The pain ripped through her like a knife.
>>
>> "Kaoru?" Kenshin looked like he wanted to hurt something. _He's that worried,_ Kaoru thought, _and frustrated...._
>>
>> "Sorry....That one hurt a lot." She looked exhausted. He gently cooled her face with a damp cloth.
>>
>> "Are you okay?" He felt totally out of control. He didn't know what to do anymore. She was in such pain. No matter how much she tried to keep it from him, he saw it in her eyes. Images of Kaoru dead, their baby dead, haunted him.
>>
>> "Ke-Ke-KenSHIN!!!! I have to push. I have to push NOW!" The pressure was too much. It was time. She couldn't wait any longer.
>>
>> _Please. Please let them both be okay. Let them both be okay._ Kenshin moved to help her. There was so much blood. So much.....
>>
>> "Ka-Kaoru. I can see....the baby's head. The baby is coming."

>>
>> "Uhg!" Kaoru pushed harder. Something within her instinctively knew what to do. "Uhhhh! Kenshin," she panted, "we're almost there."

>>
>> "I love you." They stared at each other through their tears.
Kenshin is crying? she thought, but another pain hit her, urging her to push again. One more time.
>>
>> "Uhhhg!"
>>
>> "He's here. Kaoru. We have a son. Kaoru," he whispered, "we have a son." Kenshin cut the cord and cleaned him up. His hair was dark red.

>>
>> "He's beautiful. Kenshin," she said tiredly, "we're going to wait a few months before we try this again, okay?" Kaoru gasped suddenly. "Kenshin? I think I have to push again...."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "_Tadaima_!" Yahiko shook the snow off his jacket. The storm had lasted all night, totally changing the scenery of Tokyo to white. But the sun had broken through, warming the air a few degrees.
>>
>> "_Okaeri_!" Kenshin stood in the doorway of the main room. He looked more than a little exhausted.
>>
>> "Kenshin, didja have a rough night or something? You're still in the same clothes as yesterday. Did Kaoru make you run around looking for food? What was she craving last night? Onigiri with pickled daikon? She always wants vegetables in the middle of winter!"
>>
>> "No. She had the babies last night."
>>
>> "Oh, so that's why. Of course, having the babies would tire both of you out.....She HAD THE BABIES? BABIES? PLURAL?" Yahiko paled and ran into Kaoru and Kenshin's room.
>>
>> "Kaoru!"
>>
>> "Shhh." Kaoru lay on the futon, her long hair spilling around her in a black curtain. She smiled softly at him. "Yahiko, they're sleeping...."
>>
>> "Twins? Kaoru! Geesh, is there something in the water? Kenshin, I was joking when I said that you were gonna have twins."
>>
>> "No. Triplets." Kaoru smiled tiredly. "Triplets. Yahiko," she asked softly, "do you want to meet them?" But he couldn't hear her. He lay passed out on the ground.
>>
>> "There must be something in the water...." Kaoru just shook her head and sighed.

> **Yoko:
> My roommate informs me that labor for triplets is longer and they usually come out in a rush with no break between (thanks Rhona!), but I kinda decided to keep it like this for now and just put a note at the end cuz it feels better to me and it's less torture on poor

Kenshin.

> <p> <p> Go to
> Part 8<a>

9. adventures in babysitting

A New Era: Part 8 -- The Deepest Part of Our Hearts

> **Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era**
>
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>
> Japanese Notes:
> Baka - Idiot. Stupid.
> Oka - Mom. Informal, colloqu. styl
> Haraheta - I'm hungry. Informal, colloqu. style.
> Onegai (shimasu) - Please
> Kami-sama - God.
> Aishiteru - I love you. (vb. to love)
> Anata - lit. You. Used as 'Darling' or when addressing your husband.
>
> Names:
>Ryo - The kanji mean CompleteFinished
>Minoru - With the kanji for Truth
Mikako - Three kanji: Beautiful. Sweet Smell. Child. - Using the kanji Ka - also read as Kaoru/Kaori, but it's different from the kanji used in Kaoru's name. Used interchangeably in meaning. Kaoru means "balmy." Ka/Kaoru/Kaori means "sweet smelling."
>
> Written: 2/5/99
>
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
>
 http://www.webslacker.com/ardith
>
> **A New Era: Part 8 -- The Deepest Part of Our Hearts**
>
>> Kenshin sat in the dim light waiting for day to break. The soft, rhythmic sounds of breathing punctured the silence. Beside him, his wife and their babies slept. It was so hard to believe. But holding his daughter and sons in his arms.... Everything he ever wanted, everything he ever needed was here. This was home and Himura Kaoru had given it to him. He didn't think that he could love her any more than he did. He was wrong.
>>
>> He got up silently and laid down on his stomach next to the sleeping infants. He just wanted to watch them breath. Each breath brought home further the fact that they were real. He reached out and

gently brushed a dark curl away from Mikako's face. She sighed softly, flexing her fist, and slept on. They were so fragile. He never knew that he could feel so many things at once. Happiness. Love. Fear.

>>

>> The fear had been building for months. Kaoru had complained during her pregnancy that he was hovering, that she felt like he was smothering her. The truth was... there was so much that could have happen to her. He could have lost her. But she was fine.... She gave birth easily. There were no problems. They were blessed with three healthy babes. That should have reassured him. But....

>>

>> Kaoru sighed softly. She felt so exhausted, but it had been worth it. But, she didn't feel like opening her eyes just yet. Her eyelids felt so heavy. She moved slowly, testing her body. She winced at the soreness that she could feel deep to her bones.

>>

>> "Are you awake?" Kaoru could hear the smile in his voice. She mumbled and shook her head slowly. She smiled at his low chuckle. _Kenshin._ She opened her eyes when she heard the mewling cries of the triplets. She touched her now flat belly and smiled. Triplets. They were probably going to be more than a handful. Yahiko was going to be busy helping, she thought with a smile.

>>

>> "You're hungry." She sat up gingerly. "Patience. You must learn perseverance and diligence in life. You'll have to take turns," she admonished them gently. Kenshin could not stop smiling. He comforted the other newborns as she cradled Ryo, the most demanding of the three, and began to feed him.

>>

>> "Training already?"

>>

>> "You're never too young to start on a good path." Kaoru closed her eyes at the feeling of Ryo suckling at her breast. It felt totally different from.... She looked at Kenshin who watched her with hooded eyes. She smiled back at him.

>>

>> It took his breath. The sight of Kaoru feeding their child... All those years ago, he would never had dreamed that he could be this happy. He hadn't let himself. The baby at her breast nuzzled contentedly, suckling softly in the dim light of the early morning. Ryo already had his red hair. Kaoru smoothed the short, spiky locks soothingly as she fed him. She murmured something to him and smiled. How could she look so young and yet so wise? Her eyes seemed to hold answers to mysterious questions that he could only guess at.

>>

>> Next to them, Mikako began to fuss. Kaoru watched him pick up their tiny daughter, holding her gently, comforting her. At her breast, Ryo had stopped eating and had fallen into a sated sleep. She shifted the baby in her arms and rocked him into a deeper sleep. Kaoru looked up at her husband. He seemed to be concentrating all his attention on the baby in his arms.

>>

>> "Kenshin. What's wrong?" He looked so pensive. He had been keeping something from her. This last month, sometimes he looked as if he was in a totally different world. She had waited to see if he would tell her what was bothering him, but he hadn't. It was time to nag it out of him. A wife's prerogative, Megumi would say with a nod.

>>

>> "What's wrong?" he repeated absently.

>>
>> "With you. There's something wrong. Tell me. You've been trying to hide it. Stop." Kenshin winced at the hurt he could hear in her voice. She had probably been waiting for him to open up and talk to her. But it was hard to express what he was feeling. He had kept it to himself for so long.
>>
>> "I'm terrified," he whispered softly. Kaoru looked up. Kenshin was staring down at his daughter. Mikako blinked sleepily back at him. Her eyes already showed signs of being violet. His eyes.
>>
>> "Terrified? Of what?" For how long? Gods, Kenshin, why have you been keeping from that me? You're supposed to talk to me!
>>
>> "I'm scared for them. It's just...." Kenshin struggled to put into words his fears. "They are a part of both of us, but they are so small. This world is so harsh. So horrible. So unpredictable." He took Ryo from her arms, laying him down as Kaoru began to feed Mikako. "So violent." Minoru screwed up his face impatiently. Kenshin murmured quietly to him. Kaoru smiled when Minoru immediately calmed down, blinking his soft dark blue eyes up at his father. Minoru raised his tiny fist up, wrapping his small fingers around his father's. "Oro~ He's going to be strong." The thought made him smile softly.
>>
>> Baka! You're supposed to share all of this with your wife! He probably didn't want to worry her. Kenshin should know better. "Why didn't you talk to me? Kenshin, we can't protect them from everything. We can only give them a good start."
>>
>> "I know that. It just that.... We're not responsible for just us any longer. We have to make them ready for the world."
>>
>> Kenshin thought back on his own childhood. He never wanted his children to experience the factors that had shaped him. Being an orphan. Having to deal with so much death. Building this era of peace was about the future. Now, more than ever, he wanted the future to be everything he had fought for. He knew just how fragile life could be.

>>
>> "Talk to me, Kenshin."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "Shinta..."
>>
>> "Oka... Haraheta...." Shinta was hungry. Her baby was hungry. She couldn't even lift her head. She cursed at the illness that was draining her strength. Her husband lay on the pallet beside her. His breathing was shallow, almost imperceptible. He was going to.... Kami-sama, please. Protect this child. Protect him. Make him happy. Give him that. Let him have a future. Onegaishimasu... Onegai...
>>
>> "Shinta... Your father and I are a little sick." Yuki could not stop the tears. She knew the signs. Her love was not going to make it. She brushed the dark red hair away from his face. His beautiful face. The fever had dried him out. His lips were cracked and red. But, he looked so peaceful. So...still.
>>
>> No. Kami-sama, no. Not yet. Not yet.

>>
>> It was too late. Too late. He was gone. She softly kissed his lips one last time. _Aishiteru,_ anata...
>>
>> She could feel the fever draining at her now, sucking away her strength. But she couldn't let it win. She couldn't. If she was gone, their Shinta would be alone. She had to live. She had to live. She had to.... For Shinta.
>>
>> "Oka..."
>>
>> "Don't worry, we'll get better." He watched without understanding as she began to slump weakly to the side. "Soon..."
>>
>> "Oka?"
>>
>> "_Dai...jou...bu_," she whispered. "Shinta...," she whispered. She tried to finger comb his tangled locks, but didn't have the strength. She tried to move her lips, but she couldn't.... Death. It called her, luring her with the sweet promise of peace. She tried to fight it, but it sucked her in. _Protect this child. Let him be happy. Let him be..._
>>
>> "Oka?" She wasn't moving. He kneeled closer and shook her shoulder. "Ne, Oka. _ Haraheta....." She didn't answer. "Oka?"
>>
>> *****
>>
>> Kenshin had not thought of that day in so long. The day his parents went away. The day their family was ripped apart and he was left alone. His parents were a fuzzy memory that he could not quite recall. He only remembered warmth. Love. Afterward he had been alone and frightened. In those dark days, Shinta had held on to those memories. The memory of happiness he had felt with his parents were a refuge. If the pain was too much, he would escape into that world where his mother was waiting with open arms. Where he could hear his father laugh and remember the feel of him tossing him in the air to catch him on the way down.
>>
>> He had been sold into slavery after his parents had died. The child that he was did not understand what was going on. The man he became understood all to clearly and fought so that the weak would be protected. As Kenshin looked at his children and beautiful wife, he knew that he would do just about anything to make sure that they were protected now.
>>
>> Kaoru watched the emotions play across her husband's face as he talked about the last memory of his parents. The protective love he had known as a small boy had been ripped away from him. _No wonder he is worried about the children. No wonder he watched me like a hawk for the last few months._ He had lost the ones he loved too many times. Love had been taken away, beyond his control.
>>
>> Kaoru leaned forward, reaching out to touch his face gently. She ran her fingers through his loose hair. He inched closer to her.
"Kaoru? I-"
>>
>> "Shhh," she whispered, pointing down. The little ones were asleep. They had all gorged themselves on milk and now were quite content. She kissed him softly. "Kenshin. We can't control everything.

Something may happen, but then again, it may not.

>>

>> "If you keep thinking about what _could _happen, you can't live fully. We just have to do our best and be happy with what we have right now." She kissed him again, savoring the sensation of having him close. Of being held by him. "You aren't alone, Kenshin. You haven't been alone since I attacked you that day."

>>

>> "Attacked me? You didn't even touch me. Oro~" Kaoru pounced, pulling him closer to her. She hugged him for the child he had been and for the man he had become.

>>

>> "I don't think so," she whispered against his neck. "I'm pretty sure I wounded you badly. After all, I got you here, didn't I? And I'm pretty much set on keeping you. You're mine. Just give up."

>>

>> "Am I? I guess I should." He arranged her hair to fall over one shoulder then kissed her sweetly. "I give up, then."

>>

>> "Good think you know when you've lost."

>>

>> "Yeah. Good thing."

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "After my parents died. Before I met my shishou...." Kenshin spoke hesitantly. He had never wanted to talk about that part of his past. He had tried to bury it. He had mostly succeeded. So what if sometimes he had dreams? He had more horrid images to dream of. The images of death and destruction from the Bakumatsu should have been far more etched in his psyche. Comparatively, his childhood fears were nothing. But they still haunted him.... The voices and smells. The images of the other children who were just as lost. "I..."

>>

>> Kaoru could sense the tension in his muscles. She murmured soothingly and snuggled closer to him. Kenshin smiled at her comforting gesture. Once Kaoru loved someone, she would protect them always. But she couldn't erase the past.

>>

>> "Did you know that they used to sell off girl children in villages. Sell them off so they could have food. That was how poor some people were. Girls were bartered," he explained softly. If Kaoru had been unfortunate enough to have been born into one of those villages, she would have been, too. Kenshin thanked the gods that she never had to experience that.

>>

>> "Humans were treated as possessions, Kaoru. I was a possession, too. The village couldn't afford another mouth to feed. They barely had enough for themselves. What were they supposed to do?" He had asked himself that many times before. He tried to forgive them. But it had been hard.

>>

>> "I...I was sold to a man in a larger town. He was very wealthy. A merchant. He sold cloth and he needed workers. Children have small hands and so he bought children. And he would..." Kaoru held him close to her, as if she was trying to absorb his pain. "He wasn't a very good man. He would do things to the other children. There were so many of us there that he would take aside and..." Kenshin closed his eyes at the blurred memories of the dark and dank. Of hiding with other children and scattering. One would always be caught, though. He

could never forget the images. The sounds. "I was too young, though. He would just beat me. But I saw things there that should not have been allowed to happen. We were powerless."

>>

>> "Kenshin." Kaoru touched a faded scar on his shoulder. How many scars were from his childhood? How many from the Bakumatsu? "How did you get away? When did you meet Hiko?"

>>

>> "One of the older boys finally killed him. The boy couldn't take the abuse anymore. He...he snapped. That was the first time I saw someone killed. It was self-defense. I don't know what happened to they boy. He was taken away. I had never seen so much blood." Kaoru tried to picture him. Alone and frightened. Barely a baby. It pained her heart.

>>

>> "Some people sold us again. That's how I got to be with that caravan. Then I met Akane and Kasumi. They were so kind to me. They were slaves, too. They had been since they were children..." Kenshin fell silent. Kaoru listened to his breath. She could feel him try to control himself. She reached out across their bodies and held his hand as he recounted the attack of caravan by bandits. Of the massacre that followed.

>>

>> "They died saving me. Kaoru, I don't ever want to lose any of you. No one. Not anymore."

>>

>> "Kenshin. I can't promise that nothing will ever happen."

>>

>> "I know..." She brought his roughen hand to her lips, kissing it gently.

>>

>> "But we are all together now. We are here for each other. Good times, bad... It doesn't matter. And rest assured, my love, that all of us will know how to fight. For each other and ourselves."

>>

>> "Kaoru..."

>>

>> "The world is so very different, Kenshin. The future is going to be totally different from our pasts. Before you came, I didn't have anyone either. You and Yahiko, Sano and Megumi became my family. I know how it feels to lose someone, too, Kenshin. But we can't live our lives in fear of losing people we love. We just can't." Kaoru cupped his face, gently kissing his lips. She understood the fears very well. But she needed to get through to him. Life was full of changes. Of twist and turns and they could only ride them out.

>>

>> "So, you see, you just have take what comes. And be happy with it. You make me happy." She kissed him. "Now, I think we better get back to some more important issues," she whispered against his lips as she caught the sounds of the triplets beginning to stir.

>>

>> "Like what?"

>>

>> "Like how can 2 people clean up and change 3 babies?" she asked, kissing his nose.

>>

>> "I say that we call Yahiko."

>>

>> "Oooh. Good idea. I'll tell him to think of it as training." She laughed, hugging him close. "You're never too young for training."

> Yoko:
> It's true they used to sell off girl children and stuff. I learned all sorts of neat stuff in my class on Images of Japan. We watched this movie called Ballad of Nariama that was about peasant life in Japan. It was very interesting. Very different from other Japanese period movies. Rude and rough and not very pretty.
 Anyway, hoped that wasn't too dark. This fic is supposed to be happy, but this is part of Kenshin's past, so I thought that I should write about it.

Go to

> [Part 9](rknew09.html)

10. sanctuary

A New Era: Part 9 -- Adventures in Babysitting

> **Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era**
>
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>
> All characters I create belong to me.
> >
>
> Thanks, ladies (you know who you are)! ^_~
>
> Japanese Notes:
> >
>
> Names:
> Ryo - The kanji mean CompleteFinished
> Minoru - With the kanji for Truth
 Mikako - Three kanji: Beautiful. Sweet Smell. Child. - Using the kanji Ka - also read as Kaoru/Kaori, but it's different from the kanji used in Kaoru's name. Used interchangeably in meaning. Kaoru means "balmy." Ka/Kaoru/Kaori means "sweet smelling."
>
> Written: 6/20/99
>
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
>
 http://www.hanabatake.com
>
> **A New Era: Part 9 -- Adventures in Babysitting **
>
>> "No! No! No!" Yahiko was definitely going crazy. How could he not? Here he was, alone in the dojo with the three craziest- "Ryo! Minoru! MIKAKO!!! You guys better stop it. Oh, I'm gonna KILL Kaoru and Kenshin!" _ I can't even blink, cuz they'll- _ "Oh, not the SHINAI!" Yahiko grimaced as he heard the crash of the wooden swords falling. It definitely was not a bright idea to try to distract them by going into the practice room.
>>
>> Half the house was in shambles. Yahiko snorted in disbelief. _ How could they move so fast?_ Kenshin and Kaoru were going to freak out

when they saw what happened. Well, that was what they got for leaving him alone with the babies. He definitely would not have volunteered for this if he had known what he had in store for him.

>>

>> The triplets were already walking, much to everyone's delight. Less than a year old and so advanced. He had been very proud that the babies were so smart and quick. He never realized how quick they were until he had to deal with them alone.

>>

>> _How does Kenshin handle them when Kaoru and I are teaching?_

>>

>> Ryo gurgled and grinned at him. "Nii-cha! Nii-cha!" Going in for the kill, huh? He was sharper than a sword tip.

>>

>> "Oooh boy. That cute act is not gonna cut it, kid. When your parents get back from the train station, I'm going to tell them what you did to your mama's favorite obi." He didn't know why Kenshin and Kaoru had to go to meet Misao and Aoshi at the station. It wasn't was if Aoshi didn't already know the way here. He was a ninja! He knew his way around Tokyo and this dojo.

>>

>> He just hoped Tsubame would get here soon. Kaoru and Kenshin sent a note to the Akabeko before they left, just in case. He had told them that he wouldn't need help. Kenshin laughed and patted him on the back, shook his head and said, "Just think of it as another lesson."

>>

>> "I'll give you another lesson, Kenshin! I can't believe you didn't warn me how they could be when only one person is with them!"

>>

>> Ryo-chan just grinned and gurgled again. His brother and sister toddled over, taking a break from the mass destruction they were causing and sat next to him, smiling sweetly at Yahiko. Yahiko sighed. Lethal cuteness. What was he going to do?

>>

>> "Yahiko-kun? Where are you?"

>>

>> "Tsubame," he whispered, half-afraid that it was a hallucination brought on by a nervous breakdown. "Tsubame! We're in the practice room!"

>>

>> Mikako balanced herself, getting on her feet to walk awkwardly towards him. She stopped and gave him her cutest, baby-gum smile. Yahiko's heart melted. Again. She was going to break more than a few hearts. No way he could rat out on them. He'd just have to clean up and find a way to explain about everything.

>>

>> She moved forward, reaching out to cling to his hakama. The boys were amusing themselves with some toy balls he had brought in. Finally! They are calming down. It took long enough! He sighed in relief.

>>

>> "Yahiko?"

>>

>> "Tsubame! You don't know how glad I am to see you!" Suddenly he felt a breeze tickle his legs.

>>

>> No way. The little monster didn't. She couldn't have.

>>

>> But there was no mistaking the feeling of air on skin. Mikako had

some how pulled so that the ties that held up his hakama were untied. Now Tsubame was going to-

>>

>> "Um. Yahiko?" He could feel his ears turning red. "Your -"

>>

>> "Yeah. I know." He grabbed his hakama and quickly secured them, double knotting this time.

>>

>> "Mikako, huh?"

>>

>> "The triplets cannot be stopped!!! Help me!"

>>

>> Yahiko looked so cute and helpless. There was just something about a man panicking about babies that was just so endearing. Especially with his pants around his legs! That alone was worth the trip over.

>>

>> The triplets, or the Terrors, as Yahiko just dubbed them, just crawled up to Tsubame, climbing onto her lap as if they weren't trying to drive him crazy for half an hour.

>>

>> Definitely worse then Shin-chan at his most mischievous.

Definitely.

>>

>> "You don't know what they put me through." Yahiko took a deep breath and began to tell how the triplet took every advantage of him.

>>

>> Tsubame could only laugh as he told her how the triplets decide that Yahiko was an easy target, leading him around the house and the dojo. Getting into everything.

>>

>> "I think they are just playing. They are Kenshin and Kaoru's kids. They probably inherited a lot of....um....talent. Not to mention energy." She swallowed another giggle. Yahiko probably wouldn't appreciate her laughing at him. She surreptitiously wiped a tear from her eye. But it was really hard.

>>

>> "Oh yeah. They got buckets of speed. Help me Tsubame. You are my only hope."

>>

>> "Okay. Let's start with getting them to sleep. We can clean up when they are napping. That should help, right? How hard could that be?"

>>

>> *****

>>

>> It was harder than even Tsubame could imagine. They did not want to go to sleep. No way, no how. After half an hour of trying to catch them, Yahiko and Tsubame finally cornered the children in Yahiko's room. Yahiko spread out a futon and blankets in hopes that they would gravitate towards the softness and fall asleep. It didn't work.

>>

>> "Oh my. How can three such angelic faces hide such..."

>>

>> "Cunning? Deviousness? Diabolical intent?" They may look like angels, but no way was he going to underestimate them again. Man, he was going to lecture them when they were old enough to remember!

>>

>> "Oh my..."

>>
>> He was exhausted. And they didn't look like they were even a little winded. The futon was spread out invitingly. Why weren't they going to sleep? He certainly felt like collapsing!
>>
>> "I told you. They are trying to drive us completely insane. We have to get them to take a nap."
>>
>> "Hmmm. What should we do?"
>>
>> *****
>>
>> "Do you think they are okay?"
>>
>> "Don't worry, Kaoru. I'm sure they're all fine."
>>
>> "Yahiko has never been alone with the children before and you know how they are."
>>
>> Kenshin grinned to himself. "_Hai. _ Mikako and the boys are really great. So smart."
>>
>> "Kenshin. They are also really...talented. Yahiko hasn't exactly been alone with them since they started to walk. You know that they get into everything." Kaoru sighed and shook her head.
>>
>> "That's why I sent for Tsubame. Don't worry, Kaoru-chan. They'll be fine."
>>
>> "You really think so?"
>>
>> "Yahiko wouldn't let anything go wrong."
>>
>> "Hmmm..."
>>
>> "Tsubame wouldn't let him. I have total confidence in those two."

>>
>> *****
>>
>> "You have got to be kidding me."
>>
>> "Ya-hi-ko! It may be the only way."
>>
>> "I don't think so!"
>>
>> "It calms babies down. You know it works. Seinosuke and Keiko always fall for it. Shinnosuke, too. Now come on!"
>>
>> "I don't think-"
>>
>> "Sing!"
>>
>> "_Ha-hai! Wakatta!_" Yahiko could feel the heat climbing up his face. Sing. Okay. He sat next to the babies on the futon. He took a breath and focused on his hands.
>>
>>> Sakura float down
>The season has come.
Again.
>Again.
I wait for you.

>Please.
Please.
>Don't forget me
I wait for you
>How long?
How long?
>My heart, I will wait.
Till the sakura are gone.
>Till the sakura are gone.
Forever.
>I will love you, my heart.
Always.
>>
>> "That was beautiful, Yahiko." Tsubame had leaned closer while he was singing. When he finally looked up from his hands, she was almost pressed up against him. His voice was just marvelous. She could listen to him sing for hours.
>>
>> "Um. Thanks." Embarrassed, he looked around. Ryo, Minoru and Mikako were sitting on the futon watching the pair avidly.
>>
>> "Nii-cha? Bu?" Minoru blinked up at them.
>>
>> "It didn't work."
>>
>> "Oh. Hmm. We go to the next plan."
>>
>> "And that is?"
>>
>> "Hmmm. When I think of it, I'll let you know."
>>
>> "Tsubame!"
>>
>> "Don't worry! I got it. We feed them. Babies fall asleep after that."
>>
>> "Small problem. They still, um, need Kaoru for that."
>>
>> "Oh. That would be a problem. They are coming home soon, right?"

>>
>> "Yeah. They said they'd be back in two hours or so. They just wanted to make sure that Aoshi and Misao were okay." Yahiko ran his finger through his hair in frustration, mussing the dark locks even more than they were when Tsubame first arrived.
>>
>> "Hmmm. Why don't we just sit them down and talk to them. Ryo-chan. Mino-chan. Mika-chan. You want to hear a story, don't you?" The babies gurgled at her in delight. Ah, they were a smart bunch.
>>
>> "Yahiko-kun is going to clean up the dojo a bit while Tsubame-onee-chan will tell you a story. Okay?"
>>
>> "Hey!"
>>
>> "Go on, so Kaoru-san and Kenshin-san don't freak out. If I came home to that, I would be frantic."
>>
>> "Fine. You get them to nap, and I'll clean up."
>>
>> "What a good idea." She laughed as he slid the door shut behind him.
>>
>> "Now that we're all alone, I'll tell you the story of a little girl who liked this little boy for a long, long time, but he could never see it. You want to hear about it?" The babies cooed happily in

reply. Tsubame smiled and began her tale.

>>

>> *****

>>

>> They were asleep. Yahiko softly slid the door shut behind him. Tsubame lay between the babies, her arm out-stretched, soft palm facing up. They all looked so cute.

>>

>> Yahiko stretched and stifled a yawn. They looked so comfortable. He wanted to lay down. Just for a little bit. Nothing major. Just to rest before Kenshin and Kaoru got back. He yawned again and gave up to sleep.

>>

>> Tsubame opened her eyes and smiled softly at the sight of Yahiko asleep beside her. She scooted closer to him, sighed, and fell back asleep.

>>

>> *****

>>

>> Minoru was chewing on Yahiko's hair. Kaoru had to cover her mouth to prevent herself from laughing out loud at the sight. The whole house had been quiet when they got back. Too quiet.... When they slid open the door to Yahiko's room, they were treated to the sight of the babies lying on and around a sleeping Yahiko and Tsubame.

>>

>> It was adorable.

>>

>> "They must have driven them crazy," Kaoru whispered. Her stomach hurt from trying not to laugh. They probably needed the sleep.

>>

>> Kenshin pulled his wife closer to him, burying his smiling face in her hair. "Looks like Yahiko and Tsubame got to spend some time together, though." He moved a lock away from her ear and whispered, "Lucky them."

>>

>> Kaoru shivered at the feel of his breath on her. "Yeah. Lucky them. Maybe we should let them have this, um, privilege more often."

>>

>> "We're only giving them a little practice. To...prepare them." He smiled that half smile that always made her melt inside.

>>

>> "Of course. It's for their own good. We go out and leave them in charge so they learn responsibility."

>>

>> "Looks like they are going to need it, eventually."

>>

>> "Hmmm."

>>

>> "Now, let's go see if Misao and Aoshi are settled. I don't think we're needed here just yet." Kaoru nodded, took his hand and lead her husband away from the room.

Go to

> Part 10<a>

11. peace

A New Era: Part 10 -- Sanctuary

> **
>
> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era
>
> **
>
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>
> All characters I create belong to me.
>
>
> Thanks, ladies (you know who you are)! ^_~
>
> Japanese Notes:
>
>
> _zabuton_ - Japanese cushion.
>
> Written: 11/01/99
>
> Yoko-chan (ardith@hanabatake.com)
>
 http://www.hanabatake.com
>
> **A New Era: Part 10 -- Sanctuary**
>
>> "Geez. You, too?" Yahiko stared at their guest in surprise. "Is there some sort of disease out there? You're huge!" Misao stood, talking with Megumi, her stomach rounding in the front. Kaoru hit him lightly on the head to remind him of his manners. "Ow. Congratulations."
>>
>> Sanosuke smirked evilly. "If you don't know the how's and whys it happens at your age, kid, I don't know what to tell you."
>>
>> His own children were crawling around with Kenshin and Kaoru's brood. His eldest son, acting as the preverbal oldest child, acted as ringleader of the gang. He suddenly shuddered with a premonition of the future. Trouble. With a capital "T".
>>
>> "Maybe Yahiko-chan is still too young to understand," Misao replied, patting her belly blissfully. "It's a wonderful feeling." She looked around, the sights and sounds of children made her feel so happy. More content than she could ever have imagined as that sixteen year old searching far and wide for her Aoshi-sama. "There is nothing like knowing you are going to be a parent. Nothing. I can't tell you how happy I am."
>>
>> "Please don't," he stopped her, waving his hands frantically to ward off a lecture. "Oh, I understand." Yahiko nodded emphatically. "You want to breed one of those little monsters." He wasn't going to forget so soon what position he woke up in that afternoon. His hair had been sopping wet from baby drool.
>>
>> "More than anything." Misao fairly glowed. For a second, Yahiko blinked in surprise. She looked so different from that girl that Yahiko had gotten to know all those years ago. Her hair was pulled up

into a loose bun, the tendrils framing her pretty face. She had grown up so much. And she was going to be a mother. It was hard to take in.

>>

>> "Well, I'm gonna wait," Yahiko said decisively.

>>

>> "Tsubame is going to make you wait. I heard that she's learning all those languages," Sano said around the straw he had in his mouth. "You picked a girl who's wants to change the world, bless her little heart. Of course, I don't get at all what she sees in you."

>>

>> "Shut up, Sano! I-"

>>

>> "Tsubame is a smart girl. I think it's great that she's going to do what she wants. Yahiko is very lucky to have her," Megumi said calmly.

>>

>> "As long as she is happy. It was so hard for her to leave and work for the Akabeko. If she wants to get an education, then she has just as much right to it as a man. More, I'd say," Kaoru put in from the kitchen. "Education only makes a person better."

>>

>> "I..." Yahiko swallowed quickly. How did they end up on this subject. He was only sixteen. It wasn't as if Tsubame was going away anytime soon. Whatever was going to happen was going to happen, with or without those busybodies interfering. "Just leave us alone!"

>>

>> "Whatever makes you happy, Yahiko-_chan_," Misao said with a grin. It was just too fun to make fun of Yahiko. She had missed doing that when he went back to Tokyo. But then, she had her hands full trying to chase down Aoshi.

>>

>> "Misao, you shouldn't be standing for too long," Aoshi said from the doorway. He quickly crossed to her and lifted her off the ground, gently placing her a _zabuton_ at the table. "You should be resting after our trip."

>>

>> "Aoshi-sama, I'm fine. Megumi checked me over as soon as we got here," she smiled reassuringly at her husband. He worried so much about her, especially now. The first time they tried to have a baby....

>>

>> They had both been crushed when she had the miscarriage; she had only been three months along and they had been so very happy. But an epidemic of cholera had struck. It had been deadly. She had been so weak, so sick, that Aoshi thought he would lose her forever. Her beautiful, expressive face was so still at times, he had to watch closely to see if she breathed. He prayed to any god that would listen to save her. He was nothing without her. They did, but it cost the life of their unborn child.

>>

>> He watched in horror as her small body wrack with pains. She had been so weak already. So close to death... He could only hold her hand as she whimpered and then screamed as she lost the baby. Every sound she made cut into his heart. Even though the doctor insisted he leave, he wouldn't. If she were to die, he would be with her. But she lived through the pain. He held her as she held him as they both cried.

>>

>> Still, life went on.

>>
>> When Misao announced in spring that she was again carrying the heir to the Oniwabanshu, he quickly decided that they should be somewhere that had access to the best (and most trusted) medical care possible. So he wrote to Himura and to Sagara Megumi and packed his wife up for Tokyo. Misao thought that they were here for a visit; Aoshi knew that they were going to stay until the baby was born.
>>
>> "Misao has about two more months to go. She is very healthy. I think that she will be fine," Megumi assured him. She knew all about what happened last winter. It hurt her to think that they had suffered so much. Misao had been so sick, too. She would have rushed down there, if they called, if there had been time. But the epidemic was fast moving. It was over before they could get word to her. "The baby seems to be quite strong."
>>
>> "He kicks and kicks and kicks. He'll be a good jumper." Ojiya was already picking out a tree to plant at his birth, per ninja tradition, so that he could begin his training, as an heir. "Aoshi, I'm fine. The baby is fine." She placed his hand on her belly. Their child gave him a kick, making them both smile.
>>
>> "See. Now, let's eat. Junior is hungry." Kenshin put down a large bowl of rice in front of her. "That is a lot, Himura!"
>>
>> "It's the pregnant ladies' bowl. We learned that appetites run wild when the girls are pregnant," Sano replied, sticking his foot in it. "I mean.... Well, you get hungry."
>>
>> "Usually, Misao just asks for another serving," Aoshi said, sipping tea. Misao was laughing at the overflowing bowl of rice.
>>
>> "_Itatakimasu_!!!" she said with relish and began to eat.
>>
>> *****
>>
>> _Rain...._
>>
>> Yahiko looked up at the suddenly darkening skies. He hated the rain. It always reminded him of the night his mother died. It had been pouring that night. She looked so fragile in his young eyes, her vitality sucked out of her from having to try to make ends meet.
>>
>> Before the Restoration, Myojin Hitomi had been the pampered daughter, then wife of a Tokyo samurai. After...they had nothing left. His father had died in some uprising, leaving them alone in the world. His mother had to make ends meet, she wanted them to survive. So she sold herself.
>>
>> But it took a toll on her. She became ill and couldn't recover. _You didn't want to. You were tired, _okasan. But she left him. Then the gang took him and made his life hell. He had wanted to hate her, but he couldn't. She had tried so hard, loved him so much. It was not her fault the world had changed, leaving her with little to support her.
>>
>> "Why are you sitting here, Yahiko?" Misao eased her bulk down beside him, rubbing at her aching back. It had been a month since they came from Kyoto. Aoshi had taken to helping Kenshin work around the house as Kaoru taught the students with him. Misao often went to

help Megumi at the clinic. It was getting harder for her to move around, though. He could tell Aoshi wanted to make her stop going, but Misao wanted to help and he found it hard to say no to her.

>>

>> Today, Kaoru suggested a compromise. Sano brought the children to the dojo and Misao would watch them all. The rain had made them sleepy. Getting Shinnosuke, Seinosuke, Keiko, Ryo, Minoru and Mikako to nap was easier than jumping a wall.

>>

>> When one was not pregnant, that is....

>>

>> She had come out to get some air, only to find Yahiko alone. The look on his face made her want to hug him and cry.

>>

>> "I was just thinking." Yahiko had looked so sad, staring out into the rain. Sad and young.

>>

>> "About?"

>>

>> "Being a parent. My mother died so young."

>>

>> "Because of what happened after the Restoration?" Misao watched as so many people were displaced, but the Restoration had been right on so many levels. The poor people had been suffering for too long. "It was hard on the samurai class." Yahiko's parents had been born and bred in that class. There were rich samurai and there were poor samurai, but all were proud of their heritage, their past.

>>

>> "Yeah. The samurai fought on both sides, you know. And in the end, they were tossed away." Disenfranchised by the Meiji government... "I- She was like a ghost in the end. She didn't want to be in this world. My father was gone...."

>>

>> "But she had you."

>>

>> "Yeah. Little things remind me of her. It's just... I... It's hard to remember her face. I hardly knew my father, but I feel like I'm losing her." She wanted me to be strong. To live.

>>

>> "Yahiko." Misao knew how that felt. She had lost her parents when she was young, too. "She loved you. My parents died when I was little more than a baby. Just remember the love." Misao sighed, "It was hard having to grow up in these times." Misao put a protective hand over her belly and sighed. "I hope that if something were to happen to us... that someone could help them grow up. Like Kaoru and Kenshin and everyone helped you."

>>

>> "Yeah...." Yahiko leaned back and watched the rain fall. "So you had Okina and the rest of the Oniwabanshu. Didn't Aoshi feel like a pervert, marrying you? I mean, he was probably there when you were born." He flinched, waiting for the attack, but it never happened. He turned to stare at her as she laughed.

>>

>> "Aoshi-sama tried really hard to get away. It was hard for him to be part of us again. He felt like he did too much damage to our relationship. Stupid."

>>

>> "He did try to kill Okina."

>>

>> "If he wanted him dead, he would have died. Aoshi-sama had to

forgive himself. He was stubborn about admitting that he loved me, too."

>>

>> "How did you pull that one?"

>>

>> "He loves me. He came to his senses one day." One of their neighbors had offered to arrange a miai for Misao. She had been 18, almost an old maid, the woman said. Of course, within hearing distance of Aoshi, who had taken duties at the restaurant.

>>

>> Misao declined, but she brought the young man in anyway. The girls had giggled and sighed when he came in. Yamaguchi Miroku was handsome and rich. A brilliant catch in this new age. He was even polished by Western schooling. Why did the old woman want her to marry him? She never found out, though. Aoshi stopped the impromptu introductions by announcing that she had to follow Oniwabanshu traditions and could not marry outside a ninja clan.

>>

>> Of course, no one had said anything to contradict his pronouncement. No such rule had existed for them.... Later, Misao pointed out that lie to him. He merely shrugged and the matter was dropped. When their friendly neighborhood matchmaker decided to look for a shinobi bridegroom, Aoshi could not evade any longer. "Misao is not available. She already has been promised to someone. Please do not waste your efforts."

>>

>> Misao was not one to just sit back and let things happen. She went in for the attack. By the end, she got Aoshi to admit he didn't want her to get married to anyone. And that he loved her. Of course, it took some majorly timed questions and meetings alone, but she got her man.

>>

>> "And Aoshi-sama is not too old for me, Yahiko. Age... is only a number."

>>

>> "Aoshi and Kenshin are alike."

>>

>> "What does that mean?" she asked. She broke off and gasped as she felt a pain sharply in her abdomen.

>>

>> "Misao?"

>>

>> "Get Aoshi-sama, please...." Looking at Misao's pale face, Yahiko nodded and ran into the house to get help.

Go to

> Part 11<a>

12. full circle

A New Era: Part 12 -- Full Circle

> **
>
> Rurouni Kenshin: A New Era
>
> **
>
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>
> All characters I create belong to me.
>
>
> Thanks, ladies (you know who you are)! ^_~
>
> Written: 11/01/99
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>
> **A New Era: Part 12 -- Full Circle**
>
>> "Tsubame. Can I talk to you." Tae motioned to the young woman, pulling her to the side.
>>
>> "What is it, Tae-san?" After five years of working with her, Tsubame didn't even see a wrinkle to Tae's face. She smiled and served, all the while plotting to do things on her own. She was the best kind of girlfriend. One that would help you when you needed. She was the best kind of sister. The kind you could tell any secret to. The kind that would help you solve your problems.
>>
>> "I just want to let you know, my sister is coming to Tokyo soon."

>>
>> "Sae-san? Really? How wonderful. She hasn't visited in years."
>>
>> "She just sent word. You know how she married that business man, Yoshimura Hiro? It's very sudden, but...they are going to America."

>>
>> "They are?"
>>
>> "Yes. To California. Los Angeles. I know that you are interested in languages.... You studied a little English, right?"
>>
>> She thought she knew what Tae was going to ask her and she loved her for it. "America," she said with awe in her voice.
>>
>> Tae looked at her young charge and knew this was what she wanted in her heart, what she needed. "You'd stay with them and work and go to school there. If you want to, that is."
>>
>> "Tae-san." She felt like crying. She was giving her the opportunity to see the world, to learn.
>>
>> "Do you want to?" Tae worried the dishrag in her hand. She wanted Tsubame to have be able to learn all she wanted to. This was the best gift that she could think of. "You could come back after you finish school there. I mean, everyone would be waiting." She knew that they were young, but it had to be said. "Yahiko will still be here." She knew what Tsubame felt for him. She had told her in so many ways.
>>
>> "Yahiko.... I- you think he will wait?"
>>
>> "I think he will, Tsubame. But you have to make a decision."

>>
>> It was hard. She debated whether it was a good idea or not. She wanted to see the world outside of Japan. The world was new and changing. But, then, so was Japan.
>>
>> She did not want to leave everything she knew. It was a frightening concept. She left her family to work for Tae, but that was different. She knew that it was easy to go and visit some time. America was thousands of miles away. But she had learned over the years that if you let the world walk all over you, you gained nothing and felt like nothing. She was not that nine year old girl, new to the city. She knew other women who were strong, who made decisions that changed lives. She learned that she could be strong, too.
>>
>> For the next few weeks, she thought and thought. It _was_ her decision. Others might have accused her of being stubborn, selfish. Traditionalist would have thought that a young girl should stay, get married and take care of the family. To just settle was like that little girl she used to be. She wanted more. She just wanted to find the best path for her.
>>
>> The night before Sae was expected in Tokyo, she made her decision.
>>
>> The Himuras, Sagaras and Yahiko were at the restaurant to visit with Sae. It was the first time Tsubame saw them all together for so many days. "You all know that Sae-san is going to start the Aoibeko in California. There is a large population of Japanese in Los Angeles." With that announcement, the room was filled with voices. She stifled a laugh when she heard Sanosuke warn Sae about the _gaijins_ not paying up.
>>
>> She waited until they got a little calmer before she dropped her next bombshell. She looked at Yahiko, silently pleading with him to understand. "I decided to go with her."
>>
>> *****
>>
>> _Tsubame..._
>>
>> He had to get away, to think. He went instinctively to the river side. He looked around at the flowing water, at the tree, remembering the ten year old boy who would practice his little heart out here so many years ago. The years passed so quickly, so quietly. He didn't even think of them growing up. But he was sixteen, going on seventeen. Times had changed.
>>
>> _Why do you have to go?_
>>
>> "Yahiko. I... I wanted to tell you. I should have told you." But I wanted to be sure myself...
>>
>> "You're leaving?" He could feel a hole in his heart that was bleeding. _What do you know? You're not even seventeen. You don't know that this is forever._ But he did. It hurt to think that she was going to leave him.
>>
>> "I..." She could see the pain in his eyes when he looked at her. _Don't you understand? I thought you would understand!_ "It's the best way to learn. I need to learn."

>>
>> "What about everything here?" _What about me?_ She was leaving him. America was a world away. It was nothing like Tokyo, like Japan.

>>
>> "I'll come back. I promise." Yahiko turned away from the pleading look in her eyes.

>>
>> "You'll fall in love with some _gaijin_," he muttered. _You'll leave me forever..._

>>
>> "I wouldn't do that," she said fiercely. "Never."

>>
>> "You wouldn't?"

>>
>> "No, you idiot. I love you."

>>
>> "You...you do?" He quickly turned back to her. "I...I love you, too. But you're only 15. How do you know it's forever?"

>>
>> She pulled him to her and kissed him quickly on the lips. "Yahiko. It's always been you, stupid. It's been you since you were ten and I was nine. Since I first laid eyes on you. I know that there could never be anyone else." He smiled at the tone in her voice. She usually reserved it for scolding the children. Maybe he was acting like a child, but the future was not as stable as he had envisioned it. She wanted to leave, to go with Sae and be in America. In California of all places. The word felt foreign on his tongue. She would be so far away.

>>
>> "Tsubame. I want you to be happy." He looked into her eyes and leaned forward, kissing her softly.

>>
>> Tsubame slowly pulled back, sighing softly. "Oh, Yahiko. You make me happy. But I have to go. If I don't, I'll regret it the rest of my life. The thought of going makes me happy, too. And sad. And scared. America _is_ so far away. But I _need_ to do this."

>>
>> "I understand," he whispered, pushing her bangs away from her face. He prayed she wouldn't forget him. He knew that he wasn't so special. She could find someone better, more likable and sweet. If he loved her as he should, he should let her go and wish her the best. But he was selfish. He didn't want to lose her forever.

>>
>> "I don't want anyone but you," she whimpered, as if she heard his thoughts.

>>
>> "But..."

>>
>> "No one. I love you. Just remember that."

>>
>> "Tsubame," he whispered. His sixteen year old heart was breaking, he loved her so much. "I love you, too. I'll be here. Waiting."

>>
>> "Good. If you didn't, I'd come back and hunt you down," she grinned up at him. "Now hold me for a bit. I want to remember everything."

>>
>> They held each other as the sun went down. It was hard to let go, but Yahiko did. It was a new era, after all.

>>

>>

>>

>> **Five Years Later **

>>

>> The rain was beating down hard at the train station. Rain made for delays sometimes, but that knowledge just made the anticipation sharper. He adjusted his collar and the fit of his coat again. Western clothing was everywhere. Everyone wore some sometime. Even Kaoru had a dress or two. He wore them to remind him of Tsubame.

>>

>> His Tsubame was coming back.

>>

>> They had written to each other so often. It took weeks to get to Japan, sometimes even months, California was so far away. But he wrote every chance he got. He loved her. He didn't want to lose her.

>>

>> The years had passed slowly and quickly at times. Sometimes he felt like the world was standing still. And other times, he felt like chaos was pending. Being with Ryo, Minoru, and Mikako everyday helped him forget sometimes. They, along with Shinnosuke, Seinosuke, and Keiko drove him crazy with their antics.

>>

>> They were notorious in the neighborhood for their antics as soon as they learned that working together, they could sometimes get what they wanted. Yahiko started training them in kendo to get their little, brilliant minds off planning. If it also made him happy to be with them, it was a little bonus. But the kids were all at the dojo, getting ready for the party. Most of them didn't remember Tsubame very well, but knew that she was very close to the family. And that she was coming back from mysterious America.

>>

>> She was coming home for good...

>>

>> Yahiko sighed and shook out his umbrella nervously. The rain reminded him of their first kiss. And their last one....

>>

>> The day she had left with Sae and her husband, the rain fell lightly. At the port, she kissed on the lips in front of everyone. "There. Everyone remember that Yahiko is mine. If he even thinks of straying, tell him that I'm coming back."

>>

>> Everyone laughed and teased, but the light in Tsubame's eyes was serious. "I will be back, Yahiko. I promise."

>>

>> He was so deep into his thoughts that he almost jumped when the train came in. The screeching noise of metal on metal and water made him want to cover his ears. He restrained himself and waited until it stopped, waited for his heart to beat normally.

>>

>> The passengers began to disembark. There were men and women in kimono and western clothes. He looked frantically for her face. So many people. _How many people were on this train?_ He felt a tap on his shoulder and heard a woman clear her throat.

>>

>> "Yahiko-kun?" She was dressed in a western travel dress that hung to her ankles, her hair pinned away from her face. She looked

beautiful. Tsubame, yet not Tsubame.

>>

>> "Tsubame." She nodded, grinned and kissed him on the lips. She laughed softly. "I wasn't sure it was you. I should have asked for a picture. You took me by surprise. You look like a man. I mean, all grown up and adult." She leaned closer to study his face. "You even shave, huh?"

>>

>> "Yep. But I was doing all of those manly things before you left," he said cockily. "Tsubame," he smiled softly. "I missed you." He searched her face for some sign, anything to reassure him. She smiled sweetly up at him and winked.

>>

>> "That's good, because I missed you, too. Now, help me with this stuff and take me home."

>>

>> *****

>>

>> "You aren't sorry?" Yahiko asked nervously. They wandered the halls of the dojo. The others were sitting around the stoop, talking and watching the rain fall. They decided to leave the younger pair alone while they worked out their lives. The children were wandering about. Probably planning to attack them at any minute. Yahiko scanned the halls, watching for their first move.

>>

>> Tsubame felt a little sad to have missed the children growing up, but Yahiko had kept her informed of all the trouble they got into. And of all their brilliance and extraordinary abilities. She couldn't wait to get to know them better.

>>

>> "Sorry that I came back? Or sorry I left?"

>>

>> "Sorry you came back. It must seem so quiet here. So not like America."

>>

>> "No, I'm glad I came back. It was time. I want to stay here and teach other girls. Help them learn."

>>

>> "So you are going to teach at the girls' school?"

>>

>> "That's what I plan to do."

>>

>> "That's good. You can teach Mikako and Keiko. And they will turn your hair gray," he said, making a face. "But the kids are really smart. It's scary."

>>

>> She laughed. "I look forward to it. I can't wait." He waited for her to say more. She didn't.

>>

>> Yahiko swallowed hard. Might as well get it over with. If she rejects you, then you can go on with your life. "You know of course that I love you."

>>

>> "That's good." She turned around to face him. She wrapped her arms around him, pulling him forward for a kiss. "I've been waiting to do that for five years."

>>

>> "You have?" He couldn't breath, his heart was beating so fast.

>>

>> "You are still an idiot, Yahiko. I told you in the letters. I'm

not going to forget. Not now, not ever." He moved forward and kissed her again.

>>

>> "I'm an idiot, but you are here again. For good. You're going to marry me." It was a statement, not a question. She laughed and kissed him softly.

>>

>> "Of course."

>>

>> "You think they are gonna kiss again?" Shinnosuke asked from behind the sliding paper door. His brother and sister were behind him, as were Ryo, Minoru and Mikako. Grinning like bandits.

>>

>> "Tsubame-neechan? Does it hurt when he sticks his tongue in your mouth like that? Is he trying to taste your dinner? You haven't eaten dinner yet, though..." Mikako asked guilelessly.

>>

>> "As if you don't know, you little monster! You're mother is pregnant again!" Kaoru was six months along and Kenshin was hovering again.

>>

>> "Tsubame-neechan...are you going to have Yahiko-niichan's baby now, like Auntie Kaoru?" asked Keiko, just as guilelessly as her best friend.

>>

>> "Kissing causes babies. Ama-chan said so." Ryo stated blandly. All the children nodded. They found out this summer when Amashi came to visit from Kyoto with his parents. Ama-chan said his parents kissed all the time and now they were going to have a baby.

>>

>> "Misao and Aoshi's oldest kid. You would believe him. He's a monster, too."

>>

>> "Well are you going to have a baby now?" Minoru wanted to know. "We should tell _kachan_ and _touchan_, then. So everyone knows why Tsubame-neechan gets extra helpings." Seinosuke pointed out. Ryo and Minoru nodded in agreement.

>>

>> Ryo went up to Tsubame and patted her on her stomach gently. "The baby will be safe there, huh. I hope that he don't look like Yahiko-niichan. You're so much more pretty than 'im."

>>

>> Tsubame was trying not to laugh as the children explained that she should be resting and not on her feet, as they often heard said to Kaoru and Misao. She was sad that she missed watching the group of them get into trouble.

>>

>> "I'm not pregnant, but if you promise to keep a secret, I'll tell you all something."

>>

>> They looked at each other and nodded earnestly. "We promise!"

>>

>> "Yahiko and I are getting married. Maybe later on we will have a baby, but not today. Promise you won't say anything yet. We want it to be a surprise. You guys are the first to know."

>>

>> The children looked just about to burst with excitement. Yahiko was going to get married. And they knew it and the adults didn't. Of course they weren't going to say anything.

>>

>> Seinosuke pulled on Yahiko's sleeve. "Does that mean your finally
finally super happy, Niichan?"

>>

>> Yahiko looked at Tsubame and grinned the grin of the totally
besotted. "Yep. Looks like I have reached ultimate happiness." He
took her and and kissed the back of it, as he had seen men do in
those new fangled movies they showed in town. She blushed and smiled
up at him. God he loved her. "So, what do you say we make an
announcement?"

>>

>> "I say, let's go." The young couple, surrounded by an entourage of
children, left to find the adults that changed their lives and gave
them love. It was time for them to start their own path, together.

The End

End
file.